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HELL-HOLE
OF CREATION



L. M. NESBITT

HELL-HOLE
OF CREATION

The Exploration of Abyssinian Danakil



NEW YORK · ALFRED · A · KNOPF

1935

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*To the Memory of
the Men
who sacrificed their lives
in the endeavour to explore
the Danakil country*

■

PREFACE

IN the course of a few years it will have become impossible, if indeed it is not already impossible, for a would-be explorer to find a virgin field for his enterprise on the earth. Perchance, our grandchildren will discover means of journeying to the stars, and then no doubt they will smile at the strivings and the petty sublunary achievements of ourselves, who crept painfully and without mechanical aids over the unknown places of the earth. For my part, I feel happy that I was born in time, if only just in time, to employ the ancient slow methods of exploration, by which the very taste and smell of remote and primitive territories is forced, even though it be painfully, on the observation of the traveller. It is impossible for the man who travels by motor car to observe closely: he is too self-contained, too independent of the inhabitants of the country through which he moves, too un leisuredly, by reason of the nature of his transport. The observation of the flier must be even more superficial.

In 1927, I had been summoned from the Llanos of the Orinoco to report on platiniferous territories in Western Abyssinia. Having accomplished this mission, I proceeded to Addis Ababa — and so found myself confronted by a long-sought goal, the opportunity to explore the Danakil country.

The territory inhabited by the Danakils is divided into two parts by the frontier separating Abyssinia from Eritrea.

The Eritrean Danakil is a strip of country, some forty miles wide, which lies along the shore of the Red Sea from Massowa to Assab. It is a barren tract which has been ruled and policed by Italy during the last half-century. The real untouched Danakil lies westward of this, within the borders of Abyssinia. It forms an irregular rectangle, some 400 miles long from north to south, by 150 miles wide, and is an old upraised seabed, like the valley of the Jordan and Wadi Musa, of which indeed it is probably a continuation. In some parts it is still between 300 feet and 400 feet below the level of the Red Sea, and my companions and I frequently experienced in our tent a shade temperature ranging between 140° F. and 156° F.

Before our journey, three expeditions had been launched for the exploration of this territory or parts of it: namely, that of Munzinger in 1875, that of Giulietti in 1881, and that of Bianchi in 1884. All these expeditions met with disaster, and no European member of any one of them ever returned. The aim of these explorers had been to cross the country from the Abyssinian Plateau to the sea-coast, or vice versa; that is, to traverse it by the shortest route. My companions and I, although well aware of the great risk of the enterprise, decided to traverse the Danakil country from south to north, and so to place ourselves in a position to make a thorough exploration of it, from end to end. During our journey of three and a half months we marched some 800 miles, through country almost all of which was entirely unexplored. I myself made compass traverses covering some 20,000 square miles.

My European companions, Signor T. Pastori and Signor G. Rosina, were Italians, while I am British. We had with us fifteen natives of Abyssinia and Eritrea, and a caravan of twenty-five camels and four mules. Our armament consisted of twelve obsolete rifles, one sporting-gun, and a total of 200 rounds of ammunition. We lost three loyal and excellent fellows from among our native attendants. They were assassinated by the Danakils. Ten camels and three mules died of thirst, starvation, and fatigue.

The scientific results of the expedition were presented to the Royal Geographical Society on my return to Europe in 1928.

In these pages I have related the vicissitudes of our journey as I wrote them in my journal at the time of their occurrence, together with such descriptions of men and places as I was able to record. A mining engineer by profession, my chief qualifications for undertaking this enterprise were a varied experience of men and animals, gathered in many parts of the world, and a habit of placing my trust in Providence. Seldom has better proof been afforded of the potency of such trust than the fact that my companions and I were enabled to come safely out of the Danakil country, after fully accomplishing our object.

L.M.N.

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HELL-HOLE
OF CREATION

TOWARDS ADDIS ABABA

FROM Khartoum I had followed the Blue Nile upstream into Ethiopia. Gradually climbing terrace after terrace of the Abyssinian plateau, I had finally reached the platiniferous zone in the western extremity of the Negus Neghesti's empire. There I had been engaged in prospecting for certain minerals.

Having completed my task I now determined to travel to Addis Ababa, the capital of the country, distant some four hundred miles.

My companion, Alexander Fermor, formerly a colonel in the Russian imperial cavalry, was bound for the same destination, his object being to procure an appointment in the Abyssinian army. He was a man of fine character, who had been forced, like so many of the best of his fellow-countrymen, to seek the means of livelihood in a distant country.

We set out, accompanied by seventeen porters recruited in the Walega district, on December 3rd, 1927. Our baggage was divided among the porters in loads of not more than 40 lb. each. Each man carried his load on his head. This is by far the quickest method of travelling in this region, as porters get over the ground in less than half the time taken by pack-animals. The porters will climb almost anywhere, take short cuts which no mule or camel could negotiate, descend precipices, ford torrents by jumping from rock to rock, and even

throw the loads to one another in the most difficult places. They seldom carry food with them. At some hour of the day, when there is an opportunity of buying their simple provision, they will rest by the wayside long enough to consume a hurried meal. This done they rise quickly again, and continue their march, which lasts with no other break from dawn till sunset. Of those porters who began the journey with us, only a small proportion reached Addis Ababa. The others, falling out through exhaustion, were replaced by fresh men picked up at different points on the road.

The roughness of the rocky track was such that the horses which Fermor and I had been riding were unfit to carry us after the first few days. We continued on foot until we met a caravan, the leader of which sold us fresh animals. Yet even my second horse did not last long, but broke down and had to be led during the last two days of our journey. I was obliged to complete the distance on foot.

The scene was impressive by reason of the immense extent of the rolling plateau, which was visible from the higher line of our march. The monotony of the uniform sea of tall grasses was relieved by the huge steps of the terraces which rose out of it, one above another, up the distant mountain-sides. The trials and discomforts of the journey are forgotten as we reach the top of a mountain chain and look down the succession of cliff-like terraces to where that yellow ocean stretches below. Grim gullies lead down from the hills, each bringing its torrent of water.

In this wild country the population is very sparse, the villages scattered far apart. Occasionally we passed caravans of European goods going towards the interior; or coffee and hides going to the capital, whence they would be exported to Europe by way of Jibuti. Less frequently we saw a string of mules, each mule loaded with two small boxes, escorted by an armed guard. These were thaler caravans, loads of silver thalers, minted or manufactured at Vienna. Though newly made, each coin bears the date 1780, together with the effigy,

the motto, and the coat of arms of the Empress Maria Theresa. Thus is the memory of a white empress, nearly forgotten in the country which she ruled, still honoured in the currency of a nation of blacks. Most of the Abyssinians, Coptic Christians, believe this effigy to be that of the Virgin. The coin is worth two shillings, and weighs nearly an ounce. Two thousand thalers, worth £200 sterling, are a full load for a mule.

As actual coin is the only sort of monetary token recognized by the Abyssinians, a part of any traveller's baggage normally consists of a box or boxes, or perhaps a satchel, of coins — thalers, piastres, and tamons. The two last, subdivisions of the thaler, augment in value the farther one travels into the interior of the country. In other words, one gets less and less change for a thaler the farther one recedes from Addis Ababa.

Still stranger than the thaler caravans are the files of porters carrying on their heads sheets of galvanized iron. These sheets of metal are used by European and Asiatic traders in the interior to strengthen their houses and store-sheds. At a great distance one sees the flash and glitter of these iron sheets in the sun, as they are borne along by the porters. Perhaps it will not be until several hours later that the string of carriers passes by, each man with his unwieldy load on his head. These iron sheets cannot be trusted to pack-animals, as the trails often pass through narrow corridors in the rocks, or through dense vegetation at the bottom of ravines. In a few miles of such transportation the precious merchandise would be bent shapeless on the back of the uncomprehending mule; but the porter carries it safely past all obstacles.

Besides these various kinds of caravans we occasionally met individual travellers. Some of these were mail runners, rapidly-moving couriers carrying in the end of a cleft stick the letter with the safe delivery of which they were charged. These messenger boys are hired like any other servant or labourer. Their trustworthiness is usually vouched for by a

third party. They carry one's letters to the post office at Addis Ababa, and collect and bring back one's incoming mail there, as there is only this one post office in the whole of Abyssinia. It will readily be seen that this postal system is somewhat expensive. A person living at a distance of two weeks from the capital is obliged to employ his messenger for a month for the double journey, in addition to allowing him a week's rest at the end of it. Speed of communication, particularly in regard to telegrams, has quite a different meaning in Abyssinia to that which it bears in more advanced parts of the world. Nevertheless, there is little loitering amongst the messengers, for the time in which it is possible to travel any given journey is well known to all.

At different times several of these mail runners overtook us on the road, passed us, and rapidly disappeared between the crags or down the steep cliffs, each brandishing his mail-stick in his right hand. His left hand clutched the end of his satchel, which was thrown over his shoulder. In this he carried the scanty provision which would sustain him on the way. Practising the most sparing habits on the march, they will pass from days of the utmost exertion and endurance to days of utter inactivity, when they gorge themselves with huge meals. In this way a strong and active youth may spend many years of his life. If he can support the strain he is loath to change his manner of life, for the attraction of the road grows strong upon him. He takes a pride in knowing all that is happening in the places through which he passes and in being able to exchange the latest news with travellers as he passes by their caravans on the road. Often he will shout down a ravine in the direction of a group of huts near the stream at its bottom, informing the inhabitants, friends of his, of the news he has gathered on his way. Or a crony of his in a village perched on the summit of a hill will see him coming from afar, and will step down from the height to await him on the track as he comes speeding by. Then will the crony take the hand of him who sees the capital every month and

listen eagerly to all he has to tell of what is taking place there. Thus these runners continue in their arduous service until they can no longer hold out against advancing age or the effects of accidents.

Sometimes we pass the caravan of a chief travelling with hundreds of his relatives, dependents and slaves. Each dependent or servant may have his wife and children with him.

One day we had the felicity of meeting an Italian missionary father and his assistant, a fine young woman who rode to perfection. She was clad in white. Hidden by the trees, we had descended opposite sides of a small valley, and met face to face at the ford of the stream in the bottom.

I crossed first, and we all immediately fell into conversation. The nun was a Piedmontese, and I happened to be familiar with her native town. Before we parted she charged me with some errands for the mission-house which I should reach after a few more stages of my journey.

Then there was Tarditi, the Italian caravaneer, whom we met a few days later. He insisted on presenting Fermor and me with all he had — wine, cigars, matches — everything. He said he wanted to get away from Abyssinia and go to South Africa, so I gave him a letter of introduction to a friend of mine in the Transvaal. To move from Abyssinia to South Africa appeared to be of no more consequence to him than to move from one street to another.

At a place called Nekempti, a market centre, we were hospitably entertained by a young Syrian trader, Nazrim by name.

It was getting late one evening as we reached a ford, and we decided to stop there for the night. Our men went to gather firewood as usual, and when they came back they told us that there were some Europeans encamped below us in the valley. We hastened to see who it could be. As we approached the place we saw a large tent and several smaller ones, a line of tethered mules and another of horses, all busily eating fodder, and a number of dogs nosing about. Some very clean

servants, obviously in European employment, came towards us, and then we saw a white man coming in our direction. The latter was Doctor Koeling, a citizen of the United States, a learned missionary who had spent a number of years in the province of Beni Shangul. With him were his wife and his two little girls. We all became good friends at once, and decided to spend the evening together.

Dinner in the Doctor's big tent was the first meal prepared in the European manner which I had enjoyed for months, in fact since I had been the guest of Major Knox, Governor of the Fung Province, at his house at Roseires on the banks of the Blue Nile.

Even here among the lonely terraces of the Abyssinian plateau Mrs. Koeling's presence created an atmosphere of home. A note of inexpressible charm was struck in that black and savage country by the exquisite grace of the two little girls, with their long plaits neatly falling over each shoulder.

Doctor Koeling was on his way to Addis Ababa, having left Northern Ethiopia in order to take his little daughters to Europe to be educated. It was late in the night when we took our leave, and on the morrow before daybreak we had already outdistanced our friends with our fast, unencumbered march, though we could still hear each other's voices calling farewell in the grey dawn.

Our movements were rapid because we had no tents. We had only light camp-beds. When it rained we spread a waterproof sheet on these, and slept under that. Under the bed we pushed some of the porters' packages and the rifles and ammunition of the zabantias.

Zabantias are the armed men, the hired escort it is customary to travel with in these regions. In a country in which perjury is not considered to be a crime it is useful to have available a witness on whom, if occasion should arise, one might repose a glimmer of a hope that his evidence would be delivered with some truth.

We had two zabantias, who had nothing to do except abuse

each other and curse the porters, or occasionally to run to some near-by hut in order to buy chickens or native beer or engera bread for us, while the file of porters kept steadily on the march. We found that whenever it became necessary to deal with officials who proposed to levy tolls and customs duties, imposed by themselves in their private capacity, we could repudiate their claims more effectually and expeditiously ourselves. These facts reduced the status of our particular zabantias from that of men-at-arms to domestic servants, with a consequence of greater speed, modesty and obedience on their part.

In our order of march, I used to travel in the van, and Fermor closed the rear — urging forward the sore-footed and the exhausted until we fell in with fresh men who could be hired in their stead.

One afternoon, as we came to a ford over the river Awash, we overtook a small party of Tigrins who had been travelling ahead of us all the morning. There were two men riding black mountain mules, followed by two boys, their attendants, who carried their masters' weapons wrapped in a cloth, and also a few pots and pans tied to a string over their shoulders. The two travellers were friends, men of mature age, who were on their way to Addis Ababa in search of amusement, as had been their periodical habit, they said, for some years. One of them was long and lank; the other was short and thick-set.

When we all reached the ford the short Tigrin dismounted in the middle of the stream, unslung from his belt a horn goblet, and proceeded to fill it with water, taking care to dip it upstream, away from the animal's hooves. Having filled his goblet, he approached me, holding it out, and insisted with many smiles that I should drink. I took the vessel and drank, for it was clear that he was an amiable man trying to be of service. It was thus that I met for the first time, and even tasted of its water, the river of which I was to see so much in the following months when I should follow its

course until it ended in the Aussan Sultanate — soaked dry by the deserts of Danakil.

As we resumed our march my Tigrin friend rode jovially alongside of me, showing me his Wetterli rifle, which he said he had picked up on the battlefield of Adua. To him Addis Ababa represented the sum total of all the most marvellous things in the world. There were coffee-houses and places of various amusements, said he, and shops in which one could buy articles such as a man had never dreamt existed. Often he would check his flow of speech, while his face took on an expression of cunning knowledge and deep experience. Then he would concentrate his gaze on some part of my dress, raise his eyes slowly till they met mine, and finally, looking up to heaven with an ineffable smile, eyelids half shut, he would throw out staccato words: 'shiur-beet (sherbet) . . . bee-see-clee (bicycle) . . . o-to-mo-veel (automobile).' After this he would give vent to repeated exclamations, which seemed to express in a condensed form his memories of many strange things and episodes which he had observed. These utterings were accompanied by a grave, slow nodding of his head, expressive of regret and sadness.

Was it that my friend, in contemplating the many foreign innovations which were finding their way into his country, was seized with an inexpressible melancholy and a longing for the older simple times and customs which were beginning to pass away?

But quickly he would resume his mirthful mood, the mood for which nature had designed him, and with odd gestures now would he imitate the motion of the o-to-mo-veel and the bee-see-clee, and essay to produce the noises of their engines and of their horns and bells. Then turning quickly in his saddle, he would expound the meaning of it all with lightning sentences to those of our men who had not yet seen the wonders of the capital.

Addis Ababa acts as a magnet to the wonder-loving population. The men and women of the Plateau respond to its call

on the slightest opportunity, drawn by curiosity rather than by a hope or desire to make their fortune. This last is an idea that hardly occurs to them: they were born poor, they are poor, and they are intended by Fate to remain poor. Once absorbed by the metropolis they remain there, seldom attempting to return to the place of their birth. So long as climate and general conditions of life are similar to those they have always known, home-sickness does not oppress them.

The merry Tigrin, through his narrative, was arousing in our men a closer anticipation of the wonders of the city. They listened to him, gaping, while those of the crowd who had already seen Addis Ababa, in order to exhibit their knowledge, added yet greater exaggerations.

Very enjoyable our Tigrin was as he reproduced his experiences of Western civilization with African gestures. He would shut his eyes for a few seconds and shake his head in a frenzy, in order to indicate the surprise and wonder that would be felt at the sight of the things he was describing. A click of his tongue was to imitate the uncorking of a bottle: and then with his empty hands he would pour out liquid into an imaginary glass, raise it to his mouth and swallow it — his head thrown back, as a chicken drinks. A sudden shudder would pass over him. Opening his mouth wide, he would inhale noisy breaths and massage his throat, making wry faces to show his audience that he had been drinking something fiery. Now he falls to yelling out the names of the alcoholic beverages which he had tasted in the capital: 'Cuniac . . . mataxia (brandy) . . . peppermint.' Next he roars out the names of the dishes he has eaten, and so passes on to describe the offices where people 'sit and read and write eternally.'

We were now approaching close to our destination. My horse could not go any farther, but we were already at Addis Salem, the old capital. A Greek merchant whom we met on the road told us that we might get a motor car by telephoning to the Hotel de France in Addis Ababa. He pointed out a zinc shed as the place where we should find the telephone.

It was open and empty, but it was a joy to us to see the wires, the insulators, the switches. Soon an attendant appeared, an Abyssinian. He tried to speak to Addis Ababa, but Addis Ababa would not or could not answer. The poor Abyssinian shouted himself hoarse, but all to no purpose. With the idea of making himself better understood he began to spell out the words, letter by letter. But he made no pause between the end of one word and the beginning of another, though he made a pause in the middle of every word. He repeated the letters two at a time: 'Ho-te-ld-eF-ra-nc-e.' This he repeated many times.

But there was no reply.

Then he took the handle, and turned it for several minutes. This done, he took a deep breath, unhooked the receiver again, spat saliva on the earthen floor, and again spoke.

There was no reply.

He threw a glance at us, inviting us to recognize how he was wronged. We answered with sympathetic smiles. Taking courage again, he swore at the village urchins who were crowding at the door, kicked out a mangy dog which had come in and sat down at his feet, and finally, having decided that he had given enough time to Addis Ababa to come to a decision as to whether it would answer or not, he reapplied himself in earnest to learning the outcome of that decision. His body was sprawled against the instrument; the black ebomite was lost against that dark skin, and 'ah-lo! ah-lo!' he called, trying to imitate the French 'aloi!'

We could wait no longer, for the evening was approaching.

We resumed our journey. I would not accept my Tigrin friend's mule, which he offered me; and out of respect to me, since I could not ride my exhausted beast, he dismounted and walked alongside of me, leading his animal by the bridle.

At Addis Salem I saw a broken cart-wheel, the first wheel I had seen since leaving Roseires in the Sudan. It was like seeing a friendly face.

We stopped when it became dark, in a small clearing surrounded by thickets, so as to be sheltered from the wind.

On the morrow we started early, feeling buoyed up by the hope of reaching Addis Ababa that evening.

On reaching Oletta we saw some signs of civilization, including a few European houses. The most appalling feature was the complete absence of trees. The last isolated cypresses had disappeared, and for many miles round Addis Ababa not a tree was to be seen.

A generation ago the Empress, having grown weary of the old capital, Addis Salem, pointed to a spot in the open country and commanded her architects to build her a new palace there. This was the inception of Addis Ababa (the New Flower). It was also the death-knell of all the trees in the vicinity. Every tree was cut down for timber and firewood, and the ring of desolation became wider and wider. Then a foreigner came to the country and was given a concession to plant eucalyptus trees. At the present time eucalyptus trees are the only variety to be found anywhere near the capital.

At last we came to the rim of a terrace, and the Tigrin pointed out to me a dark blotch on the distant plain below. It was Addis Ababa's mass of eucalyptus plantations. There were no signs of buildings, roofs, or spires: merely a brush-stroke of blue, hinting at vegetation lying on the tawny floor of the immense amphitheatre, girdled by its surrounding hills. In the sky above it there floated a thin horizontal streak of grey vapour.

No sooner did I see where the city of our destination lay than I said farewell to my good Tigrin, arranged with Fermor where we would meet in the evening, and forthwith left the caravan. Swiftly I went down the breakneck descent between the crags and boulders of the terrace wall.

I passed along the rough paths which wind among the eucalyptus plantations. Gradually these took on more of the semblance of roads, and beside them I saw the first hovels of the town. The houses which I presently came to were more solidly built, square mud structures. I had left the gloomy monotony of the eucalyptus trees, those bare straight stems, often resembling telegraph poles rather than living trees. I

had in fact arrived at a point where the road was encumbered with heaps of stones, recently, or perhaps not recently, unloaded from bullock carts. Suddenly Post Office Square, the heart of the metropolis, revealed itself to me. Until now the city had presented the spectacle of a large but shabby African village. Post Office Square struck a different note. It was full of noise and confusion, unpaved, unkempt, and was not even a square. It is a long triangle. The post office, which gives it its name, is a stone building of two stories, poor and unsightly, bearing a long funereal plank painted black, with the name in gilt letters in Latin and Amharic. A series of wooden balconies, propped up with poles, embellish the façade of this architectural triumph.

In a line with the post office there is a row of houses, some low and some tall, built for the most part of boarding and corrugated iron. The lower parts of these are used as shops, coffee-houses, bars, and houses of ill-repute. Each has a small window or two looking on the street. Three ways radiate from the apex of the triangle, all unpaved. Here there are more coffee-houses and a few shops.

On the long side facing the post office there is a row of huts or open-fronted hovels. These are shops kept by Greeks, Syrians, Turks, Armenians, and other Asiatics. One long veranda, zinc-roofed, supported on poles, runs before the whole length of this miserable construction. It looks like a straightened-out and magnified dead earth-worm, with the mob of shoppers alongside to represent the ants pulling at it.

The third side, the shortest, is occupied by a building flanked by two roads. This had some pretence to European architecture, but it was unfinished. It showed bare skeleton walls, and work on it was at a standstill when I saw it. It told the tale of many builders, more or less enterprising and trustworthy, who handed it from one to another after each had worked at it for a short time. It belonged to the Empress, and she did not pay her contractors their dues.

The middle of the Square is a sort of quarry, where cut

stone, gravel, road metal, and other similar materials lie in heaps. Yet, though every building and road-surface is blatantly in need of repair, nobody makes any use of these materials lying ready to hand.

There was a certain amount of traffic to be seen in the Square; a few motor cars that stood waiting for fares, a few white people on horseback, and a crowd of natives, all barefooted and dirty, aimlessly jostling their way hither and thither.

I realized with relief that at least nobody was paying any attention to the bad state of my clothing. I took a car and went to see a business correspondent, and at his house I waited for Fermor's arrival. It was already growing dark by the time Fermor arrived with the porters, and we were glad to accept our correspondent's offer to stay the night in his house.

On the following morning we paid our men off, and moved our belongings to the Imperial Hotel.

LIFE IN THE CAPITAL

AFTER spending several months in travelling and camping in the open, the Imperial Hotel seemed to us a haven of rest and comfort. We soon made a number of friends in the town. Fermor had letters of introduction to a number of Russians, and by this means we soon became acquainted with the whole of the Muscovite colony. For my part, I also had letters to people of various nationalities, with the result that we were by no means hard put to it to kill time.

I naturally called upon the British Minister and the Consul, and I also met the official representatives of France and other European countries. The Postmaster-General, an obliging Frenchman, and his principal assistant, a highly Europeanized Abyssinian, promised to see to it that my letters should reach me promptly. The Minister for Foreign Affairs endorsed my passport with his own hand, with the result that this document now bears the signature of one supreme official amongst the many endorsements of frontier clerks.

Sometimes we moved about in hired motor cars, but more usually on horseback, for the roads in Addis Ababa are of the worst possible description — with the slight exception of those short stretches which connect the European Legations, and the railway station, with Post Office Square.

It is the universal practice to ride, followed by a mounted servant. The representatives of foreign Powers are attended

by cavalry escorts, drawn from their various colonial regiments — Indians, Somalis, Eritreans. By far the finest are the Indian Sowars of the British Minister, good-looking, tall, turbaned men with square beards meticulously trimmed. They carry their lances vertically, with perfect uniformity, as they trot behind the King's representative, offering an example of steadiness and discipline in striking contrast to the swaggering and overbearing behaviour assumed by the escorts of some of the other foreign agents.

The effective range of motor cars is extremely limited. Those few which are seen were all transported by the railway from Jibuti, and, once arrived at Addis Ababa, they are as it were in a prison. They cannot be driven beyond the immediate vicinity of the town. In the town itself they are obliged to move more slowly than the pedestrians, for the principal streets are thronged continually by a dense crowd of people, making it difficult for a car to move at all. Every day is market day in Addis Ababa. The crowd is partly composed of the people of the town, and partly of the inhabitants of the surrounding villages. It is in a perpetual clamour from morning till night, like a huge uproarious hive of bees. The air is laden with loathsome dust, and the mixed smell of vegetables, perspiring Africans, spices, and scents is indescribable.

Sometimes the mob is broken for a moment to permit the passage of a European man and woman riding in to make purchases or to pay calls. There is little in the market which is calculated to appeal to European tastes, and in almost everything their wants are supplied directly from Europe. The Abyssinians from the distant villages will stop and gape at these white people, the like of whom they may have never before seen in the course of their lives, but the remainder of the crowd, more accustomed to such sights, will quickly push and jostle the peasants and send them reeling into circulation again.

Then a chief comes by, riding a diminutive horse or mule. He is surrounded by a bare-foot nondescript escort of men-at-

arms, carrying rifles. They hop along with their chief, seeming to imitate the jerky gait of his horse, whose paces are entirely untrained. The chief wears a short black cloak of a European fashion, a mark of his superior station. Two brass studs and a small chain invariably adorn the collar of the cloak. In some cases the garment is of blue velvet. The head of such a personage is crowned with a big grey hat, and altogether he contrasts oddly with the general crowd; their uncovered woolly heads, their flowing shroud-like chammas. The members of the escort contend for a place near their master. It is enough to succeed in placing a hand on the withers of his horse, or on the saddle, stirrups, bridle — anywhere so long as direct contact is made with the animal he rides and so with the chief himself. Thus encircled about, almost as though borne along by the perspiring retinue, the grey hat and the great man under it move along. And then, since it is above all things necessary to impart to the world the impression that he is concerned with affairs of great import, the chief and his jostling escort move with preoccupied dispatch. So, trotting and hopping hurriedly, the group proceeds on its way, nor, if there are people abroad to watch it, does it abate its rapid pace even when going uphill. The climb will end somewhere; an easier road will follow, a road empty of men, and then the panting men-at-arms will be free to pause and walk more slowly and recover their breath, as does a village brass band on the day of its patron saint. ¶

Sometimes two of these hurrying clusters of humanity will come face to face. For a moment their progress is checked; they hesitate, each party backs a little and its members crowd together. Keen glances are directed by each at the other. Each is summing-up the 'importance' of the other and contrasting it with its own. In a few moments it becomes clear as to which side must give way, but this is done with dignity, with no diminution of self-esteem. All Abyssinians are inordinately proud.

Perhaps a wise elder is seen, riding his horse with quiet

dignity. The long folds of his snowy chamma fall down the animal's flanks, covering the rider's feet. The great toe of each bare foot is thrust into the stirrup—a ring of thick wire. Only very important men and dandies wear shoes, and socks are never worn. They do not even follow the custom of the Zulu boys of South Africa, who whiten their ankles with pipe-clay and then patiently, with a bit of stick dipped in saliva, make certain lines and dots to represent the top and lace-holes of imaginary shoes.

The shoes worn by the Abyssinians are invariably of patent leather. These shoes strike a note of dissonance with the national chamma, and the constricting leather must torture the clumsy feet of this naturally bare-foot race. However, shoes are only worn for riding. They are discarded or exchanged for sandals when the rider would walk.

Our wise elder proudly attires himself after the fashion of the ancient inhabitants of his country. Behind him runs a youth on foot, his equerry, a leaping bundle of rags and scrap-iron. He carries his master's ironmongery: a shield wrapped in a cloth, an old rifle, a long crescent-shaped sword in a blue velvet sheath. The preposterous sword becomes entangled between the equerry's legs and in the folds of his chamma, and harder and harder grow the struggles and pantings of the youth at the tail of his master's horse. The youngster also carries accoutrements of his own, a lance or a big knife, loose in the handle. These things he would not dream of leaving behind him, for the bearing of arms is a sign of an honourable station, and is calculated to impress strangers.

Strings of camels constantly pass between the railway station and the town, transporting loads of goods. Bales of cotton, bags of coffee, dried hides folded in squares and tied with ropes are the principal burdens of the gurgling, lovable beast. There are also two motor lorries engaged in this transport work, but it will be long before the camel is superseded in Addis Ababa.

These more prominent persons and objects are seen in a

sea of small fry — loafers, vagrants; petty tradesmen, who display their wares on the naked ground; beggars in rags, some mounted on skinny donkeys, man and beast covered with loathsome sores. There are bunches of gaping peasants from the interior, together with Arabs, Turks and Armenians. Here and there one sees two men chained together, walking peaceably side by side. These last are creditor and debtor, the former having attached the latter to his own person in order to ensure against his absconding before paying his debt or ransom. Or they may have been the parties to a lawsuit already settled, in which justice has delivered the convicted party into the hands of his opponent, that he may serve him during the term of his sentence. The winner of an action sometimes pays a substitute and chains him to the convict instead. It usually happened until quite recently that convicted murderers were handed over to the relatives of the victim for execution. They thus had the satisfaction of torturing and putting them to death at their leisure.

The court of law is held in the open market-place, where the judges' stone seats are to be seen. Anybody who wishes to lodge a suit goes to this tribunal, and any person in the crowd may be summoned by another to act as a member of the jury. When a difference between two persons cannot be satisfactorily settled by fighting, by clawing and tearing each other's hair and biting the ears, and when one intimates to the other that he wishes to have the matter settled by

Menelik's Word,' the question then becomes a matter for debate or legal process. In that case any chance passer-by may be called upon, in the absence of a regular justice of the peace, to hear the case and deliver judgment. There are also lawyers who will conduct a prosecution or a defence, or attend to a client's business affairs in the approved manner. These professional gentlemen have their offices, either a little table at a street-crossing or a corner in some dirty earth-floored hovel. As legal lights they display an expressive sign near their place of business. It consists of a long wooden board on which are

painted the likeness of an ear, an inkpot, a pen, and a book. The mystic purpose of this sign is to illustrate the sequence of hearing and recording the affairs of clients. At each end of the board is painted a lion *passant*, with a human face, and carrying over its shoulder a flag — the arms of Abyssinia.

The market-place is roughly divided into sections, a separate section for each class of goods offered for sale. There are sections for cotton goods, foodstuffs, earthenware, and so on. Venders of valuable articles spread a blanket on the ground and on this they display their silver filigree and brass-work, and similar wares. The market is never closed, and is never deserted. One constantly hears the cry 'Guragil . . . Guragil' 'Porter! Porter!' The Guragis are a tribe of the Plateau, and their name has become a synonym for porter, though they are not portorage monopolists.

The most successful of the traders are Asiatics, greasy fat men from India, Syrians, Arabs, Armenians, and so forth.

As for women, one sees pretty Indians with caste marks painted on their foreheads, tall, erect, moving gracefully. Most of the Abyssinian women are dirty, oily, and flabby. Some, with a baby tied on their back, walk with a stoop, in order to keep the child in an upright position. There are maidens with their hair parted in a dozen little plaits and the whole head thickly plastered with butter which drips in the sun and turns rancid, filling the air about the fair maid with a revolting stench.

From these scenes I turn without regret to the Imperial Hotel. There I met on the day of his arrival from Jibuti, Mr. Fraser, a lawyer from the City of London. He had come to Addis Ababa on professional business. I enjoyed his company immensely, and his paternal interest in my activities will not be easily forgotten. We also made friends with two other men, Howland and Sturmer. The former was a tea-planter in Kenya, and he had come to the Plateau in order to investigate the possibilities of introducing the cultivation of tea into Abyssinia. He was a very pleasant fellow, and the

two months which he spent in Addis Ababa were all too short for me.

Doctor Sturmer came from Berlin. Tall, shaven-headed, cultured, he aroused much mirth in Fermor and me by reason of the fact that, in spite of our solicitations to the contrary, he invariably wore his spurs upside down. His intention was to go to western Abyssinia and spend some years encamped in the woods there. He possessed a magnificent new equipment, complete to the last detail. He announced that he intended to set up his camp in the hotel grounds, so that we might have an opportunity of inspecting it *in situ*. He carried out his promise a few days later, and on going out to see it we found a spectacle reminiscent of a tropical outfitter's stand at an exhibition. He made us sit down on his creaking collapsible chairs, and feel the texture of his tent-roof and ropes, and then proceeded to give a demonstration of the method of fastening the various appliances. Accustomed as I was to the rudest and shabbiest equipment, I was delighted to drink to the success of the beautiful pea-green camp and its intrepid owner. Finally, a photographer was summoned. Sturmer mounted to the back of his horse, with his spurs correctly adjusted this time, and placed himself before the blooming camp. The rest of us ranged ourselves in a semi-circle on either side of him: a group of native servants belonging to the hotel stood on one flank, and with a few ladies to introduce a wistful note, the scene was complete. The photograph was taken, the photographer saluted to right and left, and we all relaxed. Sturmer dismounted. The official ceremony was over.

That night Sturmer slept in his camp in the hotel grounds, and so continued to do until his departure for the west, only entering the hotel at meal-times.

A few days later I went with Fermor and some others to the races. Ras Tafari, then Regent, now Negus Neghesti, was present, a small well-proportioned man. The last race was won by an Abyssinian, a groom in the employ of one of the secretaries of the British Legation. He was an elderly man,

but he rode so well that he was easily first past the winning-post. In the excitement he hardly seemed to realize that he had won the race.

Now, the rule was that when the Regent was present the winner of each race had to ride before the royal stand and salute. But this Abyssinian jockey had forgotten to do so. A number of people pushed the old man and his horse in the right direction, and in a dazed way he rode past the Regent — but without making a salute. Suddenly he realized his omission, wheeled his panting horse about, jumped to the ground, and holding his bridle-rein and his cap in his left hand, kneeled down and bent his head to the grass. He then devoutly touched the ground with his right hand and brought it to his lips, as if to reverently salute the earth whereon the Regent had trodden. Immediately a rustling of voices went about the stand, and was followed by a rousing burst of hand-clapping. The old fellow had turned the staleness of routine into something fresh and charming.

One afternoon I went to the Palace for an audience with Ras Tafari. Howland, the tea-planter, was to be received in audience on the same day, so we went together. We rode through the eucalyptus plantations, and came to a gate in the first line of walls, where we dismounted. We were then led through an open corridor to a second line of fortifications. Here we were delivered over to a set of higher officials, all dressed in the native costume with the addition of patent leather shoes or sandals. We were ushered into a pavilion overlooking the vast amphitheatre of hill and plain in which Addis Ababa stands. After waiting some minutes we were conducted by the deferential officials down a flight of steps, and across half a dozen courtyards where other groups of court officials were standing. Finally we reached a small enclosure fenced about with corrugated iron. A door of corrugated iron on a framework of wood was opened to us, and when our escort had exchanged some remarks with other attendants within, we were passed inside and the door closed. We were

now in the *sancta sanctorum*. A broad flight of wooden steps led up to a pavilion, the front of which was open, resembling the stage of an improvised theatre. We climbed the stairs and stood on the stage.

Who could tell what adventurer had built that shed for a king? No doubt it had been undertaken, to kill time and earn a little money, by somebody waiting for a concession, or a government appointment, or scheming to induce the Negus to purchase the usual shipload of rifles and ammunition which was awaiting a favorable opportunity to be smuggled through the barrier of European colonies which insulates Abyssinia from the sea.

I was examining the painted prospects and the wonderful shading and foreshortenings in the decorations, when Barane Marcos, Minister of Post and Telegraph, approached me with a soft whisper, and ushered me into one of the wings of the stage, as it were. I found myself in a small room, upholstered in red, containing a few chairs, and an armchair in which sat the Regent. His Highness, a young man, affable, with tranquil manners, spoke in hushed tones in a slow soft voice. Through the Minister, acting as interpreter, he inquired as to my health and my recent journey, and asked whether I had experienced any difficulties in travelling through his country. His Highness spoke in Amharic and I spoke in French, Barane Marcos translating in both cases. Though Ras Tafari speaks French fluently it is considered etiquette to employ an interpreter. It is also useful from an official point of view, since in the event of there being any necessity to amend what was said, for reasons of state, it is merely necessary to say that the interpreter made mistakes. It also reduces the danger of committing oneself when giving immediate replies to questions, as it gives one more time to think out and frame one's speech in the desired form.

There was one small window in the room, facing towards the north. Looking through it, I could see a large part of the fortifications of the Palace. The uncompleted walls were

badly and carelessly built, and were already partly eroded. There were gaps in the walls roughly closed with palisades of eucalyptus poles. The irregular ramparts and the flimsy wooden fences, with the sentry-boxes built precariously on the walls, made it plain that the work was that of no trained architect or engineer. I noted within the Palace enclosure a medley of pavilions, cupolas, sheds, shacks, barns, towers, galleries, turrets, passages, and balconies, constructed with wood, masonry and corrugated iron. The whole unlovely mass was thrown together without either art or order.

The only buildings in Addis Ababa which show signs of any sort of efficiency in their construction are Menelik's Tomb, one or two sacred edifices, the foreign legations, and the mission houses. The residual mass is not less ugly than a derelict suburb of the most miserable colonial settlement of the least progressive of the European Powers. Each person, whether Abyssinian, Arab, Indian, Turk, Greek, or Syrian, has built his dwelling according to his own notions in the material which he found available.

As I glanced out of the Palace window there were horizontal streaks of vapour floating low over the dark smudge of the eucalyptus trees. From below the indistinct hum of the crowds camped outside the Palace walls — camps of the dissatisfied, and of chiefs in disgrace, waiting perhaps for months together before being received by the Ruler — rose to the Imperial window, open to the oncoming night.

My interview with Ras Tafari came to an end. We shook hands, and I returned on foot with Howland to the hotel.

The most interesting foreign community in Addis Ababa is the Russian. They were all people of good social antecedents, and there was a considerable proportion of women amongst them. Ever since the Tsar Alexander III made the Abyssinians a present of a ship's cargo of discarded rifles, the Russians have been regarded as friends. After the Bolshevik revolution many Russians took refuge in Abyssinia, and preference was given to these when appointing foreigners to gov-

ernment positions. The women were given work in the hospital. This preference is likely to continue, since these refugees no longer have any connection with their own country, and are thus in no danger of arousing suspicions of having an imperialist political motive in flocking to Abyssinia. Subjects of the three countries which ring Abyssinia about with their colonies or protectorates are by no means in favour. On the Plateau they have a saying, full of meaning if somewhat crude: 'We fear the British; we hate the Italians; we loathe the French.'

Yet it must not be thought that these Russians have found high fortune, high-sounding as some of their titles may be. The government pays barely enough to enable its officials to subsist. Even though a definite salary has been agreed upon, it shrinks and shrinks in the course of passing through the various hands which have the handling of it before it reaches those of the man who has earned it.

A certain ex-officer of Engineers was given the task of drawing up an improved plan for the city of Addis Ababa. This man regularly came to blows with the Treasury officials before he succeeded in getting his salary. Eventually as he continued to insist on being paid the full salary which was provided for at his engagement, he made himself so unpopular that he was dismissed.

The homes of these Russians, and of Europeans in general who fill government posts, are all of the shabbiest — barely furnished with that which is absolutely essential for civilized people. Those of them who are able to draw a little comfort from observing the contrast between their own life and that of the universally indigent natives, may sometimes feel a glimmer of contentment. The others endure.

Abyssinia then is not a promised land even for her friendly Muscovites.

IN WIDER'S HOUSE

THE fever with which I had been afflicted on my journey from the Sudan to western Abyssinia had begun to recur, forcing me sometimes to keep to my room. This depressed me considerably, in spite of Fermor's kindness in keeping me company and bringing friends to see me.

One morning, feeling very low after a two days' attack of fever, I was lounging on the veranda of my room when a servant came to tell me that a European wanted to see me. After a few moments a man of about fifty made his appearance. He was thick-set and heavy, and his face was branded with the signs of a hard pioneering life. He was clean-shaven and his hair was grey at the temples. He wore a thick khaki shirt, heavy corduroy trousers, leggings, and a broad double felt hat. Everything in the appearance of this man, his massive limbs, his clothes, the expression of his face, revealed the African pioneer.

He told me his name — Martin Wider. He had heard of my arrival from his good friend Doctor Hesse, a valued acquaintance of mine, the learned German adviser on mining affairs to the Abyssinian Government. Wider, a man of Hungarian extraction, was a naturalized German, and had travelled a good deal in Africa. He had been in the Witwatersrand, had fought in the Boer war, had subsequently gone to German South-west Africa — always working, either

mining, trading, or planting, as chance decreed. He was a hard toiler, for ever acquiring new experience and new scars. In 1914 he was serving in East Africa with the German troops. Seven more scars were added to his collection. In 1916 he was wounded and taken prisoner, with a broken leg, and removed to the Cairo prisoners-of-war camp. In 1919 he was released, and returned to Germany. In the post-war squalor of the cold Berlin winter, coldness to which he was unused after half a lifetime in the blazing sunshine of Africa, somebody told him that Abyssinia was a Promised Land: 'Even the beggars ride horses there. Think of it!' The man, with all his experience of life, was caught by the curious story, like any villager who had never stirred out of his parish. So it happens, even to the most level-headed, when the critical instant ticks.

With several friends he left Germany, and through a series of stages in the Red Sea, Aden, Jibuti — none of them very fortunate for Wider — they finally arrived on the Plateau. Here they immediately set to work at any job that would bring them a living. But the life under a native government was too hard. Some of them went back to Europe as soon as they had saved enough money to pay for a steerage passage; the others, more hardened perhaps to up-hill struggling, stayed on and managed to exist somehow. Wider was one of those who stayed, and knowing something of mining, architecture, furniture-making, and contracting of all kinds, he had managed to establish himself. Like the other Europeans on the Plateau, Wider was very far from having made his fortune, but he lived in a certain degree of comfort, owned two horses and a good house, and kept several servants. These servants had never left him since the more fortunate days when he had travelled in the interior, prospecting for a mining company. He and his son had returned stricken with fever from those hard journeys. Thereupon Wider had decided to send the lad to Europe, so that in the event of his death he might at least be buried in the ground from which he had sprung.

It is not seldom that native servants remain with their master without wages through a lean time. It is not done so much from loyalty as from a lack of self-reliance in the menial, who remains satisfied with food and lodging pending his master's return to prosperity. It is in this attitude of the native that is to be found the reason why slavery will yet persist for many generations in Abyssinia. Officially, slavery has been abolished throughout the country, but this sort of voluntary serfdom is general on the Plateau. In the Danakil country naked slavery continues in the old-time style.

It is a great comfort to a man in the days of his misfortune to find that his servants are willing to continue in his service without wages until such time as he is able to improve his position. The chances and fluctuations of the white man's fortunes in tropical countries are more frequent and more bitter in Ethiopia than in any other country that I have seen.

I gave Wider a brief account of myself, and when he learnt that I had been a mine-captain on the Rand, our friendship was assured. He said that he was engaged on a building contract at present, but that he was expecting to go into the interior of the country on a prospecting journey before long. For my part, I told him that before leaving Ethiopia I wanted to explore a certain unknown tract of country, but that I could not undertake such a journey until I had completely recovered from the fever which oppressed me.

No sooner did the good-hearted man hear about my sickness than he immediately offered me the freedom of his house. I gladly accepted his invitation, and we agreed that in a few days' time I would move to his place. I was particularly cheered by all this, because Fermor, having succeeded in obtaining a commission in Ras Tafari's army, was engaged at the Palace during the greater part of the day in the discharge of his duties.

At the beginning of 1928 I went to live in Wider's house. It was central, and at the same time quiet. A long building of a single story, with masonry walls and a zinc roof, it had a

veranda along the whole length of its front. It stood in a compound in which there were also servants' quarters and stables. This compound was inhabited by many monkeys, jackal puppies, cats, birds, two dogs and two horses. A small wing of the house contained two rooms full of bags, boxes, trunks, pack-saddles, and so forth.

Living in this house were Wider, McCreagh, an American, and his wife, Farago, a Hungarian, and myself.

McCreagh was a short sturdy man some forty years of age, disposed to be reserved. He appeared to be the victim of low spirits. He had entered into a contract with the proprietors of an American magazine to which he was to contribute 60,000 words on African life, one half relating to the Sudan and the other half to Abyssinia. For this work he had already received advance payments. Before leaving America McCreagh had joined forces with a photographer equipped with a cinema-camera. It was decided that the two men should work in conjunction. Accompanied by their wives, they had duly reached the Plateau by way of the railway from Jibuti. But during the long journey from America the various members of the party had discovered that they were temperamentally unsuited to work together. The result was that no sooner had they reached Addis Ababa than they decided to part company. The cinema-operator and his wife promptly returned to America, while the McCreaghs remained.

The American had made several short journeys from the capital, and had written a number of articles for his magazine, when suddenly something far more exciting than journalism appeared in his path. He was attracted to the Nile, as many others have been before him. In McCreagh's case it was the Blue Nile.

The Blue Nile, as is well-known, issues from Lake Tsana in Abyssinia and joins the White Nile at Khartoum, the combined stream flowing through the Sudan and Egypt to the Mediterranean. Now, the Blue Nile, after leaving the lake, takes an almost circular course of perhaps a thousand miles

through the most mountainous parts of Abyssinia. It is joined on the way by countless rushing torrents, which in the rainy season bring down enormous quantities of fine silt held in suspension. This silt is extremely valuable for enriching agricultural lands. The Nile is prized in the Sudan and Egypt for the enormous quantities of sediment which it brings down from the Abyssinian Plateau, as much as for its water. If those waters were clear, Egypt would certainly never have been the agriculturally rich region that it is and always has been — the granary of the ancient world. When any portion of the waters of the river, released from the great channel by the opening of dams and sluice-gates, is allowed to flood the agricultural lands, it carries with it wherever it goes this rich fertilizing matter. This is deposited in a thin layer on the ground as the water soaks in. It is the Blue Nile which is responsible for most of this sediment, for the White Nile, after leaving the narrow mountain rim north of Lake Albert, is joined by none but sluggish streams which, unlike the torrents of the Abyssinian Nile, carry little alluvial matter.

Now, the Abyssinians derive scarcely any benefit from the Nile. That part of it which is in their country flows entirely amongst high and barren mountains, and only when the river reaches the plains of the Sudan and Egypt can it be used for purposes of irrigation. Nevertheless, Lake Tsana, the source of the Blue Nile, and thus the main source of the agricultural wealth of both Egypt and the Sudan, is in Abyssinian territory. Why, then, say the Abyssinians, should we not levy a tax or export duty on the immense volumes of wealth which annually roll out of our country by way of the Nile channel? Why not, indeed! But, how? An enterprising foreigner whispered something about a dam across the outlet of Lake Tsana. If a barrier could be constructed large enough to hold up the main volume of water which issues from the Lake, then the comparatively small quantity of liquid mud contributed by the combined tributary torrents would probably evaporate or sink into the earth before it could reach Khartoum. With thi

potent weapon the Sudan and Egypt could be smitten prostrate, and left at the mercy of the Abyssinian government! But where was the money, necessary to build such a colossal dam, to be obtained?

One day these questions and projects came to the ear of McCreagh. His imagination was struck by the idea of a Lake Tsana barrage. He saw a fortune for himself in the scheme. If he could successfully act as intermediary between the Abyssinian Government and some American engineering firm which would undertake the construction of the dam, his own fortune would be assured. The Abyssinian customs revenues might be mortgaged as security for the cost of the enterprise.

Whether as the direct outcome of McCreagh's activities or not, it is certain that Dr. Martin, an Abyssinian, was sent to America by Ras Tafari's government to investigate the possibilities of the scheme. This move caused an uproar in the press of every interested country, and scores of pens proceeded to contribute their little torrents to a Nile of ink. Diplomatic pressure began to be exerted from various quarters, and finally the scheme was abandoned.

I met McCreagh when the excitement was at its height. He was not communicative concerning his part in the affair. He and his young wife returned to America soon afterwards.

Wider's other guest, Farago, had been an officer in the Hungarian Army. After the war he came into conflict with the republican government, and was obliged to leave the country. He gathered together the remnants of his fortune, placed his little daughter in a convent, and came to Abyssinia. He understood tobacco-growing, so having secured a concession of land, he set to work building a bungalow and huts, for himself and his labourers, ploughing, and planting tobacco. In due course he was able to prepare an excellent crop for the market.

Now, in Abyssinia nearly all business and commerce is carried on under concessions, which are understood to guarantee a monopoly of the particular rights conceded. The

monopoly for marketing Abyssinian tobacco was held by two Greeks. Farago came to Addis Ababa and approached these two men with samples of his crop. They offered him a mere fraction of what his produce was worth. He told them that if they would not purchase his tobacco for what it had cost him to produce he would be forced to abandon his plantation. They refused to help him.

Farago went back to his plantation, heartened himself with a few drinks, packed his clothes, plucked his souvenirs and photographs from the walls of his mud and reed bungalow, and carried his belongings out into the compound. Then he called his men out of their huts and bade them save their personal possessions, for he was going to set fire to everything. In less than an hour everything, bungalow, huts, sheds, tobacco crop lay behind him, blazing in pale flames under the noon-day sun as he rode into Addis Ababa.

At the capital he resorted to the house of two German counts, friends of his, whose business was to collect skins for export. Farago joined them, shot much game, and brought in many skins and heads, which were cured and mounted by the Germans who were skilled taxidermists. Farago, being anxious to give his friends at home the impression that he was living a princely life in Africa, shooting big game and so on, spent most of his money on having his best trophies mounted and in sending them home as presents. The time came, however, when his German friends, finding they were not making the handsome income they had anticipated, returned to Europe. Farago was far too proud to go back poor: he remained on the Plateau. He must now obtain employment in order to earn enough money to keep alive. Brilliant and educated man as he was, he accepted a humble position in an office, and so managed to live.

We were always a merry party at Wider's table, and usually each one of us would invite a friend to join us at dinner. Our host was the proud possessor of a petrol-gas lamp, a complicated German thing, which was used only on special oc-

casions. When we knew it was to be brought into use, Farago and I would contrive to put some mechanical part of it out of order. Then its dimming splendours in the middle of dinner would bring comical anxiety into the old man's face, to be greeted with roars of laughter by us.

We all had much leisure at that time, and would often sit till late in the night, telling each other stories from our personal experiences. In February the McCreaghs left, and a few weeks later I went too. It was not many months after that that Wider himself took to the road again, going west on an affair of mining.

I expect the old house which echoed to our songs and yells is lifeless now, the compound invaded by weeds, the stables empty. Perhaps it is let to some Greek or Syrian.

PASTORI AND ROSINA

ONE day, after I had quite recovered from my fever, I went to see my friend Gardiner, an English lawyer. I found that he was out, and decided to await his return. I had taken a book from a shelf in his study and was reading, when a native servant admitted another European into the next room. The door was partly open, and we caught sight of one another at the same moment. I was not acquainted with the man, a fact which I immediately proceeded to alter, as I somehow felt that he was a man after my own heart. I went into the other room and spoke to him in English; but he answered in French — the universal language amongst the Europeans at Addis Ababa. We had been conversing for some minutes before I discovered that he was an Italian. His name was Tullio Pastori, and he was a mining prospector and a man of many other activities. He had already heard of me, and was much interested to hear about my journey from the Walega platiniferous zone. Within half an hour we seemed to understand one another as well as though we had worked side by side for ten years. We were already firm friends.

Pastori was slightly over forty, gaunt and steely-eyed, a man who once he has made up his mind will get to his goal in spite of every obstacle. As a mere youth, a hawklet whose nest had grown too small, he left his native town, Padua, and went to seek gold in the mines of Australia. The money gained in

mining he invested in some other speculation, and promptly lost it all—with the exception of just enough to pay his passage to India. While still without employment in India, he was induced by a party of Americans to go to Abyssinia. Since then his life had been one of restlessness, worry, and dissatisfaction. When I met him he was having a troublesome time claiming from the government an indemnity, due to him in respect of certain mining property which had been destroyed in a native raid.

A few days after our meeting Pastori introduced me to another Italian named Rosina. This man was older than his compatriot, straightforward, quiet and unassuming. Twenty years before this time, though in comfortable circumstances, he had left his native Piedmont and migrated to Abyssinia. Rosina's natural bent was not towards an adventurous life, but towards the quiet monotony of a tranquil existence. But it so happened that somebody had spoken to him of Abyssinia as an almost unknown country, and consequently one of untouched opportunities. Thinking, therefore, that a short sojourn in this new El Dorado would undoubtedly fatten his money-bag, Rosina had followed this gazer who was also on his way thither. In due course my friend landed at Jibuti.

At that time the railway from Jibuti to Addis Ababa was being built, and Rosina, who was anxious to turn his hand to anything, got work on the line. He found this toil too hard, however, as he had not been accustomed to it. He turned his attention to trading, but in this he quickly lost all the money which he had brought with him. The man was now forced to take up the pick and shovel again. He might have returned to his own country and tried to forget his unfortunate experiment, but he was too proud to do this.

Miserable tropical countries are not for Europeans to settle in, except as recruits to the ruling class, unless they find themselves in danger of starving at home. Gradually the unfortunate adventurer grows callous to the brutal conditions of his

two sides of his nature is at last plainly recorded in the very lines of his countenance. Few are those who ever feel moved to bless their life in this sad and bare country, for they are few who are able to wrest more than the barest subsistence from amongst the poignant sorrows, the shame, and the corruption which they find there. Fortune rarely smiles on a man's honest efforts. The most successful are such men as in any other country would be considered as public menaces and clapped into prison.

Rosina, living in the construction-camps along the railway line, fell into a state of mental apathy; until eventually he made one more effort which carried him to Eritrea, where he engaged in agricultural work and supplied horse-fodder to the Italian military authorities. After spending nearly twenty years of his life abroad he was moved to return to his native land. But after a very few months in Europe, accustomed as he was to a different kind of life, he returned once more to the Plateau — regretting to have yielded to this pang of homesickness. In the months of his return he had come to understand what he had lost in the twenty years of his absence, and now he decided to tear himself away from these remorse-breeding surroundings for ever.

When I met him in the capital, Rosina was acting as agent for a number of Europeans employed in various activities in different parts of the interior of the country. I frequently foregathered with him and Pastori, when we would discuss our plans for the future. It was not long before we decided that we three would make a journey into the wild, almost unknown Danakil country, which lies between the Plateau and the Red Sea coast. All expeditions which had hitherto tried to explore it had been wiped out. After coming to this decision, the three of us used to meet almost daily, usually in one of the Greek cafés in Post Office Square. Here we would sit at a small table under the oleographs representing kings and queens of various Balkan States, together with heirs to thrones and royal broods. Every Majesty and Highness was fat and chubby, and

with a crown of gold also. There were no bald heads, and every god-like figure was abundantly wreathed with laurel. Other works of art represented the Bay of Naples, with a fisherman standing in a small boat and lighting his pipe at the red and smoking crater of Vesuvius; and an astonishing parrot in a cage far too small for it, so that its head and tail stuck out through the bars. Another picture, popular at Addis Ababa, was that of a steamship moving at full speed through a sea unmistakably blue, the big white-hemmed waves of which were as motionless as ploughed land. There was a frothy appearance at the ship's bow and under her counter, managed by art of sponge. The ropes of the rigging were as massive as the masts, and all the details which a landsman would most easily observe were accentuated and made most plain — especially the life-boats.

One orders an aniseed drink, and with it the waiter brings a collection of little plates containing fried potatoes, pickles, bits of roasted meat, olives, cheese — a sort of Italian *hors d'œuvres*, highly salted to arouse thirst, for the good of the house. In the more elegant dens they supply little forks: in other places you use your fingers, and fish here and there according to your taste.

In these cafés there is a gathering of more or less clean representatives of the various European countries — a mob of disillusioned broken-down vagrants, meddlers, spies, sharpers — adventurers all. Among them there are members or past-members of every imaginable profession and calling. All are adept at something: some of them have academical titles, probably self-conferred. It is possible there may be among them a harmless and respectable man, but even if that is so, he must have some mental or moral flaw in him somewhere, or he would surely wrench himself away from his diseased surroundings. The face of such a man might indicate good birth, his manners and speech might bear the stamp of education and even refinement, but if one were to inquire into his past life something unsavoury would be found. lurk-

ing there, in spite of the man's care to spread dry leaves over the slippery ground. It is unusual to see honest clean people in such loafing-places, and any seen are almost invariably birds of passage. You can easily distinguish the stayers-behind in this paupers' country by their ill-fitting clothes, thread-bare and faded, but worn with the adventurer's jaunty defiance and ostentation. Ill-shod they are, and with untrimmed hair — unless they be friends of some native barber. Some of these derelicts are waiting for a chance to move off to some other place, any place; others, who have lost all thought of ever leaving the Plateau, continue to struggle along, sometimes doing a little work that may fall in their way, when cheating, swindling and card-sharping do not supply them with enough to live on.

If these men come to the conclusion that you have money, and want to invest it, they will disclose wonderful chances and ventures to you. But always one at a time will they come, each man's quarry being respected by the others until he abandons it. The runaway cashier will tell you how much there is to be made out of textile fibres, and takes a small sample out of his pocket for you to feel. The priest who has abandoned his cassock will expound an agricultural scheme or a mining concession. The deserter or the forger will endeavour to interest you in a proposed air-transport company, or a company to be formed for the manufacture and distribution of counterfeit coin. Another hearty fellow will tell you frankly that the Plateau is riddled with incurable poverty, and that you will be wise to leave it without delay. He offers to lead you to the sea, that you may lay out your money to the best advantage in fishing for pearls.

I, too, was approached by more than one suave speaker, but they soon found that I had no desire for the overwhelming gifts they offered me with their unwashed hands. Their smiles were not withheld on that account, and the deferential salute was never omitted. In this scene of indigence and misery I have been reminded of the waters of a harbour,

where, if you throw in something which is not edible, many fish both large and small will immediately dart towards it, and each will try to bite it. But as soon as they realize it is not good to eat they turn aside with a slow disillusioned waving of their fins, consuming the least possible energy, and set themselves again on watch in the dark shadow, under the driven piles.

One evening at the Café Makonnen, perhaps the best of these wretched places, I met Don Alibio Molina, the Spaniard from Zaragoza. At Addis Ababa he kept the roulette table. When I spoke to Don Alibio and his wife, Doña Dolores, in Castilian, their surprise and delight knew no bounds. From that day forth we were excellent friends, and I often used to visit them at their house. They led an odd life, for, as they had to manage the roulette table all night, they went to bed at dawn and slept until the afternoon.

Molina used to welcome me in a particular tropical costume which he had invented for himself, a sort of very loose and gaudy pyjamas containing all sorts of strange pockets. Their house was a large masonry structure, with a spacious enclosure and a yard at the back. As I rode up Molina would perhaps see me from the veranda and his two enormous dogs would begin to bark frantically. At once he would yell out at the top of his voice, trying to quieten the dogs and calling for the servant-boys, as though he were separated from them by miles instead of yards. Two servants would come running, while the others would crane their heads from the doors of their quarters.

‘Catch the bitch! Catch the bitch! Quick! Quick!’ roars Molina.

One boy seizes and holds the bitch in question; the other boy stands in reserve. Molina is now free to look at me. He stares at me for a moment, grinning in silence from ear to ear. This is the pause which precedes the formal welcome which has been delayed by the excitement of the dogs.

‘Ola amigo! Qué tal, qué tal?’ cries the Spaniard with the

Now the servant boy attempts to move forward and open the gate, but his master with a speaking glance holds him in check. For the hearty fellow wants to theatrically open the gate himself, as an additional honour to me. He now proceeds to elaborately open both halves of the gate, though one side would allow ample room for me to pass through. I ride through and dismount. The horse is led away by the servant, while Don Alibio shakes and nearly dislocates my arm, asking countless questions, as though we had not met for years. The big swarthy Spaniard would lead me into his house, where Doña Dolores would presently join us, and tell me with a smile and in the softest voice that 'it was nice that I should sometimes remember to come and see my own house.' Doña Dolores was naturally sweet-natured, and the melancholy that hovered about her by reason of her homesickness seemed to increase her charm.

The walls of Molina's dining-room were almost covered with maps. The desire to travel widely had seized upon his mind. He constantly spoke of journeys he would like to make, both by land and sea. He delighted to follow with his finger, or with a billiard cue which stood ready in a corner, the rivers and the great mountain chains, and to ask me for information about them.

The drawing-room came next. It was very much like a museum. It was half filled with prepared skins, heaps of carpets, stuffed birds and animals, in all sorts of positions. There were snake-skins and lion-skins hung up or strewn on the floor; there were photographs of Spanish people and scenes mixed up with Abyssinian strings of beads, filigree work, plumes, lances, leather shields, knives, scimitars and ostrich eggs. The ostrich eggs were hung up in front of gilt-framed mirrors, some of which were cracked. But the cracks were supposed to be concealed by sprigs of blossom painted on the glass. The room also contained a number of chairs and couches, heavily lacquered and gilded. The servants' quarters were crowded with black men and women

of the servants in Addis Ababa, for Don Alibio's profession was a profitable one. Nevertheless, he had many interests besides gambling. He spoke about anything and everything, and even in matters of which he knew nothing at all he would expound his theories and his point of view and his judgments most quaintly and originally. He usually spoke much louder than seemed necessary, as though he was addressing a large audience. His gestures were expressive in the extreme, and he did not confine them to his hands and face; his whole body was continually being brought into service in order to make clear his meaning.

The gallant Spaniard had a large collection of firearms, from miniature rifles to elephant-guns. In the back yard a complete camp stood rigged. There were two large square tents, besides a number of small conical ones for the servants. The large tents contained camp beds, folding tables, and chairs. There were even water bottles hanging from the tent poles.

This was not a new camp, as was Sturmer's. All the articles it contained were second-hand things which had been purchased cheaply in Addis Ababa. For when a traveller or a prospector returns from a journey, in the interior, and proposes to leave the country, he usually sells his camp equipment for whatever he can get. Molina told me that he had had his camp thus set up for some weeks. He was continually improving it, buying better pieces of equipment as chance offered, just as he was continually buying second-hand rifles, and also stuffed animals and skins for his drawing-room or museum. He told me he was preparing for a long journey into the interior, that sooner or later the day would come when he, too, would tread the jungle path, and see for himself the wild men and animals which he had heard so much about. He was already training himself for the great experience. Sometimes when I went to see him he would fetch a small Mauser weapon. When taken out of its box it was a pistol, but if you screwed the box to the butt of it you could

turn it into a rifle. With this hybrid contrivance held under his arm, Don Alibio would pace, with a mixture of boldness and caution, between the tents of the empty camp in his back yard. His movements and gestures were such as he imagined to be appropriate to the stalking of big game. With each measured step his head would turn rapidly from one side to the other, piercing with his eyes the imaginary undergrowth to detect the animals hiding there. Suddenly he is tensely alert.

'Ha!' cries he. 'Something rushes out of here: crosses my path! Bang! Bang! and down she goes. Now another from the other side! Bang! and that's down too.'

So, shooting imaginary wild beasts to right and left, he comes to the yard wall. Here he turns round, and then comes back with a triumphant smile on his face. The play is over; the sport is done. My host resumes his ordinary discourse in his normal tone.

Don Alibio had been a gambling-rooms keeper in most of the Spanish cities. He had also had experience of theatrical management at Barcelona. Two years before, for some obscure reason, he had been compelled to leave his native country. He went overland to Marseilles. When he had been there some days he began to notice that every day at the same hour, and at the same little table on the pavement outside the same little café, the same man sat consuming what appeared to be the same *café-au-lait* and roll of bread. Molina one day spoke to this strange unvarying creature, and found that he was a Russian living in the direst of concealed poverty. The man appeared to be kept alive by a miracle, for his entire food was nothing more than two cups of *café-au-lait* and two rolls of bread each day. He explained that he lodged in a garret, where he paid a trifle for the privilege of lying at night on a heap of old rags, and that he was waiting at Marseilles for a government decision concerning some moneys which he expected to get from Russia.

Molina was touched by this tale of woe, but being a man

of the world he made the Russian show him the garret in which he slept. Once satisfied that he had spoken the truth, and seeing that the state of his indigence really was extreme, he proceeded to clothe and feed him. The poor Russian now racks his brains in an effort to find some way of repaying his benefactor; and suddenly it dawns upon him to impart to the good Spaniard the golden secret of Abyssinia and its undeveloped treasures. That same saying, which might be the motto of the country from the way in which it fascinates strangers, is now imparted with eager eyes and a hurrying tongue, to Molina: 'In Abyssinia even the beggars ride horses! Think of it!'

The Spaniard was not yet impressed.

'Tell me,' said he. 'Are there any roulette tables in Abyssinia?'

'No,' was the answer.

Now indeed Don Alibio is interested. Here was an undiscovered El Dorado. Some part of the riches of those caravans of ivory, gold, and gems of which the poor Russian had spoken should be diverted into his pocket by means of the little table and ball.

Molina prepared to leave for Jibuti by the first steamer. The Russian suggested a first-class speculation to pay their travelling expenses ten times over. He would abandon his claims on the Russian government if the good Spaniard would take him with him; they would purchase a quantity of discarded army clothing, cheap cotton goods, and any cheap odds and ends they could find at Marseilles, ship them to Addis Ababa, and there sell them like hot cakes at an enormous profit. Molina fell in with the scheme, and appointed the Russian as manager of the commercial venture. The goods were bought and placed on board ship. Don Alibio and his lady, together with the Russian, themselves embarked.

'The ship was a couple of hours out of Marseilles,' said Don Alibio, telling me the story, 'and I was taking a walk

on deck, making friends with my fellow-passengers, when the rustling sound of a crowd of people all moving together came from the lower deck. I could hear voices calling, "Come and see! Come and see! A girl has been found stowed away in a bathroom!"

Don Alibio went to see what was happening. From below a crowd began to swarm up the companion-way. Presently they all spread out on the deck, and in the centre of them there was a girl accompanied by two of the ship's officers. The Captain approached; the crowd made way for him to pass, and closed behind him again. There was a brief cross-examination. Why had mademoiselle hidden herself in the ship? She had to leave France and had not the passage-money. That was all.

'Very well,' said the Captain, having charged the stewardess to keep an eye on the girl, 'Mademoiselle will be landed at the first port we make.'

He turns away. The officers' hands fly to their gold-braided caps. The official inquest is over. The ladies sweetly give place to let the handsome captain through. He has no sooner moved clear than from the opposite side of the ring of people a man urgently pushes his way. So conspicuous are his actions that people instinctively make way for him. He looks all keyed up to do some imperative thing. His eyes are fixed on another man, a big hearty Spaniard, Don Alibio. The Russian, for he it is, speaks, and Don Alibio, somewhat surprised, looks round to see if it is really himself who is being addressed. The Russian is now close to him. Stretching out both arms with a masterful motion he clears a space for the two of them. Molina cannot make out what is coming next, and it is almost with relief that he sees the fanatical-looking creature drop on his knees before him.

The crowd has now closed up again, their hopes raised to keen expectation. The Russian grasps Don Alibio's knees and cries, 'You are a rich man. Save that woman!'

'Save her! Why? What from?' says Molina.

'She is my mistress, and I cannot live without her. Take her along and pay her passage. I shall be only too happy to work and make money for you.'

For a moment the crowd is spell-bound. Then whispers are heard, words are exchanged, and suddenly all begin to talk at once. The Captain has come back to see what is happening. Every eye on the ship now seems to be fastened on Don Alibio. He enjoys the situation for a few moments, and then with a magnificent gesture, says benignly, 'It is good; I shall pay.'

The party at last reached Addis Ababa. The discarded clothing and cheap material speculation proved a failure, perhaps because Molina's mind was fully occupied by schemes for converting the Abyssinians to roulette. He obtained a government permit, and at once began business, but the country, for all its mounted beggars, did not yield the profits he had been led to hope for.

When I met Molina he was endeavouring to get his permit changed into a concession granting him the sole right to open gambling rooms and sporting grounds in Abyssinia. Pioneer of roulette on the Plateau, his ambition was to introduce football, pelota, and perhaps even bull fights — anything, in fact, which could be made to yield money to the promoter.

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THE OBJECTIVE

PASTORI, Rosina and I had secretly agreed to make a journey into the Danakil country together. Each one of us was an experienced traveller in hard and hostile countries; we each possessed considerable capacities of endurance in harsh, dangerous and unhealthy conditions. We were well acquainted with the sort of work which accompanies caravaning, and were able to do it ourselves better than any hired man could do it, if occasion should demand it. We were therefore in a position to see that the work was done thoroughly by the men we employed. There was complete reciprocal confidence between the three of us in the abilities of each other, and consequently there was little need of discussion or argument in arranging our plans.

Several other people wanted to join us, but we were determined not to include in our party anybody of whose quality we felt uncertain. For when there is likely to be risk to one's life one becomes very suspicious of the abilities of strangers, and a very strict examiner of the qualifications of a would-be partner. We proposed to go to places whence no explorer had yet returned alive. There was nobody who had the power to help us, and we simply placed our trust in God. My two friends were interested in the possibility of establishing trade in the reputedly rich and fertile Aussa Sultanate. In addition, Pastori and I had a great curiosity to see whether

there were signs of rich ores in the regions we were to visit. To me, however, the greatest attraction was the seeing with my own eyes that mysterious and unknown country. Even though it were to cost me my life I would see this Danakil, the country that so far had baffled all efforts at its exploration.

Now, the belt of lowlands which stretches from the eastern spurs of the Plateau to the shores of the Red Sea sinks in places to a depth of 300 to 400 feet below sea-level. In reality it is a section of the great furrow in the Earth's crust which runs from the Dead Sea to the Great Equatorial lakes. The Red Sea itself is a part of this same feature. It is only the thin line of hills along the coast that prevents the waters of the Red Sea from penetrating into and flooding this depression. Known as Abyssinian Danakil, or the Danakil country, the tract extends from parallel 9° N. to $14^{\circ} 30'$ N., between meridian 40° E. and $41^{\circ} 30'$ E., and roughly constitutes a rectangle some 350 miles long and 100 miles wide. Abyssinian Danakil is separated from Eritrean Danakil by the thin line of hills mentioned above. The Eritrean Danakil is a strip of land some forty-five miles wide which extends along the Red Sea coast from Massowa to Assab. Being a maritime tract it never opposed great difficulties to explorers, and for nearly half a century it has been garrisoned and ruled by the Italians.

As soon as the frontier to Abyssinian Danakil is crossed, however, a change comes over the scene. The traveller finds himself in a wild untamed country, inhabited by fierce and bloodthirsty tribes. In this grim region every expedition previous to ours had met with disaster, in spite of the fact that they all chose the shortest route across the country, namely from east to west. The party of thirteen Italians, led by Giulietti and Biglieri, who attempted to cross Upper Danakil from east to west in 1881, were all massacred by the native inhabitants. Bianchi, Diana, and Monari met a similar fate in 1884, when attempting to journey from the Plateau to the Red Sea coast. Munzinger's expedition also was wiped out in

the Aussa in 1875. Others followed and met with the same fate.

Actually, there are three routes from the sea to the interior which are used by caravans, and which European merchants and officials have succeeded in crossing. These tracks are kept open by bribing the tribes through whose territories they pass, and travellers move as quickly as possible from place to place. It is dangerous to stray even a short distance from the track. These three roads are (a) that which passes from the ports of Tajura and Assab to the Aussan Sultanate, and thence to the Plateau, eventually reaching the market towns of Mofa, Batie, and Dessie; (b) that which runs across the southern end of the Danakil rectangle, and has been abandoned since the opening of the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway; and (c) a mere trail of no great importance which crosses the northern end of the rectangle.

It was our ambition to traverse the rectangle from south to north, while we were at it — that is, on its longest axis, a route which had never been attempted by Europeans before. Ours was to be an elaborately equipped expedition. We would travel the whole distance with animals, and live on the simplest of fare. We arranged to take with us fifteen natives of Abyssinia, twenty-five camels, and four mules. We were armed with twelve old rifles and two hundred cartridges. Having engaged some of the natives, and purchased the mules and a quantity of foodstuffs, we sent these on in advance to Awash Station on the railway line, where they were to await our coming. The remainder of our baggage was sent to the same place by train, and as soon as we arrived there we intended to buy camels and organize our caravan.

We did not ask permission of the Abyssinian Government, nor did we inform our respective legations of our intentions. No written permission or safe conduct would have been of any use amongst those wild tribesmen, and we feared to risk the frustration of our plans and hopes by official opposition.

DEPARTURE

THE eve of our departure had arrived. As dusk fell I set free two monkeys of mine. I thought that, favoured by the darkness, they would be able to pass through the thickest part of the eucalyptus plantations and gain the open country. I hoped they would reach the far away mountains of their former freedom before dawn. If I had released them in broad daylight they would certainly have been hunted or stoned by the urchins of the town.

As I was loosening their collars, the poor creatures bent their silky heads down for the stroking they were so fond of. On finding themselves free, they shook themselves, skipped hither and thither, and then jumped on my shoulders, and put their arms round my neck — thinking it was time to be chained up again. But I put them on the ground, and pushed them a little from me, and at last they seemed to begin to realize that there was to be no fastening-up this time, that they were captives no longer. They hopped uncertainly away from me, turning at every few steps to look back. Then they seemed in a flash to get on top of the gate-posts. From that elevation they once more looked back and whined at me. Then something drew their attention to the road on the other side of the wall. They jumped that way, and I saw them no more. Thus went the last members of our menagerie, with the exception of Farago's jackal puppy.

On the morrow, long before daybreak, Pastori came with a motor car to fetch me. We intended to drive together to the village of Akaki on the railway line, where we proposed to board the train which would bring Rosina and the remainder of our men and baggage. I took leave of Wider and Farago as the first light of day appeared. I had already said good-bye to Fermor. It was March 14th, 1928.

We reached Akaki in good time to join Rosina, and the train moved off. Throughout the morning it screeched and clanked along, and at midday it stopped at a place called Mojo. Here it remained an hour in order that the passengers might eat their midday meal.

The country consisted of rolling grass-lands, with small abrupt hills rising like bosses over the monotonous green plain. The rare trees were mostly stunted thorns. In the distance flocks of gazelles could be seen running, until they were lost in the haze. At an immense distance the plain was encircled by a chain of rugged mountains. Now and then a conical hill showed all the characteristics of an extinct volcano. These gradually became more frequent, until finally we came into a country entirely composed of lava and igneous rock. As the winding track sinks lower and lower the atmosphere changes, and one feels that one is moving summerwards. At last as evening falls we come to Awash Station, a couple of miles before the place where a great iron bridge spans the awful Awash gorge. Nothing of the gorge can be seen from this point, for its waters rush along the bottom of a deep ravine, a narrow perpendicular-sided cleft in the earth's surface, the very rim of which you cannot detect unless you know exactly where to look for it.

All trains on this line remain stationary from dusk till dawn, so that we were not the only travellers to spend the night at Awash Station. The men we had sent by road with the mules had been waiting here some days. They now helped the rest of the men whom we had brought with us to carry all our baggage to the 'Buffet,' the hostelry which, together

with all the similar establishments along the railway, is managed under a concession from the government.

We slept comfortably, for the air was not chill as at Addis Ababa. At the capital at midday it was very hot, but at sundown the air cooled in a curious unwholesome way. It did not give the pleasant relief which a falling temperature usually brings in tropical countries. A strange unhealthy dampness arose and generally made sleep unpleasant. Here at Awash I was reminded of the summer climate of southern Europe.

Before dawn I was awakened by a great bustle. Everybody in the hotel was getting up by the light of candles and acetylene lamps. The poor people who had not been able to pay for shelter got up from the roadside, stretched their arms, yawned aloud at the oncoming day, and cast a searching look around them, as all creatures do on awakening in the open. They adjusted their chammas and walked towards the train, carrying sacks and clumsy packages done up in pieces of untanned skin. There were many lowly Guragis among them, and some pig-eyed, goat-bearded Amhara chiefs. A Galla beau issued from the hotel, followed by his womenfolk in procession. The master is clothed in white cotton breeches, tight at the calf, a short black cloak, patent leather shoes, and a wide-brimmed grey hat. The ladies wear many rings and bangles, and are clothed in a thick white gown drawn in at the waist, coarse yellow stockings, and enormous low-heeled shoes. One is amazed that women's shoes are made in such elephantine sizes. As they walk towards the train, the women lean on one another, and the night jealousies are forgotten in a fond catching of each other's shoulders, lest they should stumble and arouse the mirth of the lower classes, who affect to despise these ladies of fashion.

I watched the train departing when the sun had risen and was flooding with horizontal shafts the parched treeless country. As the ironmongery noises died away in the distance we sat down to breakfast. A deep silence presently descended on

the Buffet, as the sun climbed higher and higher. It was pleasant amongst the flowers and vines growing in the garden, where the ground was kept moist with water from the railway pumping-station in the nearby gorge. Beyond the garden all was an arid wilderness.

In that handful of verdant comfort lived the Buffet cats. There were at least a hundred of them — bunches of cats, flocks, droves of cats, mother-cats and kittens and big tom-cats, prowling about everywhere, sleeping on the veranda-rails, on the window-sills, on the thresholds of doors (always left open to let in breeze and cats), on the orange trees, under the palms, amongst the flowers; some in the sun, some in the shade; purring, hissing, licking their paws, fighting; but cats, cats everywhere. I asked the manager of the establishment, a nice Egyptian from Cairo, the meaning of this feline population. He told me that old Bollolakos, the Greek concession-holder for hotels all along the railway line, had imported, some years before, a few cats, and had since allowed them to multiply at their leisure. They were not considered to be too numerous for their business of keeping the place free of scorpions, venomous spiders, centipedes, and other vermin. The Egyptian was as fond of cats as I was, and observing my interest he struck a piece of iron rail which hung from a pole near the store-room. This was the cats' dinner-gong, and as soon as they heard its note they came swarming to the place where we stood under a canopy of vines. The moving heads and backs and tails seemed without end. Half a dozen cats sprang together on this table, half a dozen scrambled on that. By dozens they climbed up the piles of chairs which the servant boys had stacked in order to sweep the floor, causing those aerial structures to shake till one or two fell crashing to the ground. For a moment I felt uneasy, picturing to myself an invasion of countless cats, a thought similar to that which had sometimes come to me in the tunnels and workings of abandoned mines overrun by hordes of rats. Large numbers of carnivorous animals, even small ones, do

not inspire feelings of pleasure or safety in man. I seemed to glimpse for a moment the feelings of the lower members of creation when they see an army of men, and I felt more in sympathy than usual with dumb animals.

The manager was throwing scraps of meat from a tin basin in amongst the feline concourse. Cats from the table-tops and the piles of chairs sprang continually into the incessant turmoil below, in order to seize and tear from some more fortunate animal the piece of meat which it had secured. I noticed that many of the cats had scars, and there were many torn and tattered ears, in some cases half the ear being absent. There were also lame cats, and cats with only one serviceable eye, veterans of many a midnight brawl. These were no pampered house-cats. Like miners and the followers of other dangerous trades, amongst whom scars, and absence of fingers and even maimed limbs, are not uncommon, so these cats of Bollolakos, which were obliged to wrench with craft and physical strength a precarious living in the midst of hard conditions, showed the marks of it on their bodies.

The village of Awash consisted of a few dozen thatched huts, together with some rather better mud-walled houses belonging to Indian and Arab traders. There were myriads of flies everywhere, and the dust and the blinding glare of the sun produced a feeling of suffocation. Bronze-hued girls naked to the waist, and children entirely naked led camels hither and thither ankle-deep in the village dust. The lanky antediluvian-looking beasts, taken from the acacia pasture, moved with a sort of pathetic lumbering gait, making gurgling noises and chewing their cud mechanically. The sideways grinding of the jaws proceeds at a slow regular rate, and though the rope halter passes through the mouth, being knotted round the lower jaw only, the animal cannot bite it through as it lies in the spaces between the teeth.

A Danakil savage of the borderlands crosses the road, alone, isolated, suspicious. In his movements, in his quick glance, there lurks something of the wild untamed animal. A feather

stuck in his hair shows that a year has not elapsed since he killed a man. A proud sign this.

By ill-luck the start of our journey coincided with the beginning of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadhan. We wanted to buy camels here, and the only people in the neighbourhood who possessed camels were Muslims. During their Lent it was hard to prevail on any of them to do business. The Danakil country is exclusively inhabited by Muslims of a sort, and Islam is extending the sphere of its influence beyond the borders of that region. On the Plateau itself the Christian faith is more general.

Eventually we found our way to another village, and were fortunate enough to find some camels owned by less strict observers of the religion of the Prophet. We purchased some of these, as few as we could manage with, for we expected to be able to buy better and cheaper animals further in the interior. We were occupied some days at Awash in preparing our caravan. Amongst primitive people everything is done slowly and deliberately. One is obliged to curb one's impatience, and conform to the custom of the country; for the habits of many centuries cannot be altered in a day, and the effort merely jars one's own temper without any good result whatever. Our objective was such as to require the husbanding of all our energies from the beginning: so would they suffice us for all the long journey, and bring us safely out of Danakil at the end. We took care to preserve nervous and mental tranquillity, so that we might make and modify our plans and assess the condition of men and animals without hastiness or bad temper.

One evening, as we still remained at Awash, the new manager of the Buffet arrived. He was a Greek some thirty years of age, inclined to dandiness. How long, we wondered, would his fine complexion last in that climate, which for six months of the year was tropical and feverish, and during the whole twelve was made worse by clouds of mosquitoes? The Egyptian was leaving because he was broken down with fever.

Not a lamp was shining in the station when the Greek arrived, but the Buffet was brilliantly lit with acetylene lights. The ugliness of the place was shrouded in gloom, while the pleasant garden, and the restaurant full of people, who had just come by the train, looked bright and gay. But on the morrow the dismalness of the place dawned upon him, and 'his arms dropped from his shoulders' as he afterwards expressed himself to me. However, he had set himself a spell of hard work under any conditions, and he determined to carry out his plan unless prevented by ill-health. At least he would have company every second night, when the hotel was full of travellers. In the intervals there were the native employees, the cats, and the scorpions.

I sometimes went out shooting with a middle-aged Greek who lived near the village. Why this man had come there to live he did not explain. He owned some cattle, and managed to keep alive by selling meat and milk to the Buffet. He told me about the massacre of a party of Greeks which had taken place in those parts a few years before. They were catching live zebras for European menageries, and had gone about twenty miles north-east of the railway line. The whole party, including Gallas and Amharas, were slaughtered by the Danakils; all excepting one Greek who was overlooked because he was lying ill with fever in a tent. He managed to crawl away into the scrub, and after nightfall he crept back to the railway line.

The Danakils kill any stranger at sight. The taking of life has become a habit of their nature.

One morning I went with Rosina to see the Awash bridge, a fine example of modern engineering, very striking in that wild scenery. We walked out on the huge iron structure spanning the abyss, and stood at the midway point. Hundreds of feet below us the river rushed silently. Not a murmur of its noise reached our ears. The walls of the gorge, black and grim, shone in the burning sun and flung out metallic reflections of light.

Beyond the gorge to the south the Kachinoa and its chain of mountains displayed its plutonic origin. On the opposite side was a boundless plain, and in the extreme distance lay the faint spurs of the Plateau. As we retraced our steps we caught a glimpse of the spot where the old caravan route crossed the gorge. There was the ancient track from Antotto to Zeila, wherein for countless generations before the coming of the railway mountains of ivory and cohorts of slaves had been conveyed to the Red Sea.

AWASH TO WARA MALKA

AFTER some difficulty we succeeded in obtaining enough camels for our purpose. Some of them we purchased, and some we hired because the owners wanted to come with us and earn wages. Three of our mules had large saddlesores on their backs, and it was impossible to ride them. This had been caused by the carelessness of some of our men, who had ridden the laden beasts from Addis Ababa, instead of leading them as they had been instructed to do. We dismissed the men who were to blame, first giving them a lesson of a certain kind in order to impress our ideas on the remainder of the gang.

At last we had assembled our caravan and all its appurtenances. The servants were: Abdul Kader, interpreter; Wolde Jesus, Abdulla, and Dimsa, personal servants to myself, Pastori and Rosina respectively; Abulker, cook; Settie, chief camel-man; Osman, Makonnen, Bayonna, Wolde Gabriel and Wolde Georghis nicknamed the Castrated, camelmen and general helpers. The interpreter, the cook, and Pastori's servant were from the neighbourhood of Mas-sowa, and spoke the Danakil language; Wolde Jesus, Wolde Gabriel, Wolde Georghis, and Dimsa were Plateau Gallas recruited at Addis Ababa: Settie was an Amhara, but had come a good deal into contact with Arabs at the coast, and had learnt much about camels from them: Bayonna and Makonnen were typical Plateau Amharas. Osman, a descendant of slaves, was engaged at Awash.

We had fifteen camels, and the four mules; and our provisions consisted of flour, rice, cheese, ship-biscuits, oil, coffee and sugar. We carried a considerable quantity of the last two items, as they would be useful for making presents. Our utensils consisted of a few iron pots and pans, and enamelled plates and mugs. We also had a small tent, a folding table, our three camp-beds, some candles, a hurricane-lamp, and a few gallons of kerosene.

At last the string of camels was waiting beyond the garden-fence of the Buffet, in the late afternoon sunshine. Our friend the Greek manager, looking sadly upon us, entreated us for the last time to give up what he called our insane suicidal plan. We shook him by the hand, and in a few moments more we were amongst our soft-footed camels, stepping with them across the glittering railway lines.

The barren dusty plain soon surrounded us with its unbroken expanse. I could hear a train faintly roaring in the distance. It grew more distinct, and then fainter. It ceased of a sudden. Again I heard it, faintly, faintly, and then the sound went out completely. So passed the last sign of civilization that I was to know for several months.

After travelling for four hours, during which we covered about twelve miles, we halted in the open wilderness. Here we partook of the expedition's first meal, and then, our camp-beds being set, we lay down and slept under the stars.

We started again at daybreak, and soon came to ground covered with tall horny grass which appeared to be entirely dried up and parched. Yet it was not dry within. The desert colours this grass with its own ochre hue, as it colours everything else in the dismal landscape. Green grass is only met with in occasional tufts close to pools or streams of water.

Scattered herds of fine buck were grazing everywhere to the horizon. Many of them were quite close to us, and seemed undismayed by our approach. Where their bodies were hidden by the tall grass only the long straight spike-like horns could be seen, moving like vertical pointers. These moving

horns conveyed an impression as of some mechanical contrivance, operated by invisible machinery. Sometimes we came very close to a group of the animals, when they would stop feeding and watch us for a few moments, and then move slowly away. But if one beast became seized by fear, immediately another in quite an unexpected direction would catch the alarm, and then another, and another, till in a few seconds panic would strike them all and set them on the run in a wild rushing crescendo.

At noon we reached a large pool called Filoa, fed by hot springs. It was almost completely surrounded by groups of mimosa and palms. On one side of it rose a vertical cliff of black basalt, split by crevices from which oozed the warm mineralized water which rippled down into the pool below. The sheet of water was perfectly still, and it mirrored with meticulous clearness the palms and other trees which surrounded it on three sides. Beautiful plumes of foliage crowded the branches of the mimosas, and waterfowl played amongst the rushes. I climbed to the top of the cliff with the men, and found warm water issuing from a maze of cracks in the volcanic rock. We filled our water-bottles, and I found that this Danakil water, besides being warm, was of a peculiar taste. We retraced our steps to the palms, where we decided to remain until the evening as the heat was considerable.

In the afternoon some natives made their appearance, and asked us for presents. They were tall straight Danakils, with something feline in their air and carriage. Our men sat close in camp, their rifles ready to their hands. At dusk herds of camels came to the pool to drink. The young ones ran jerkily hither and thither, stumbling on the rocks and recovering themselves more by fortunate chance than by skill, as it seemed. From birth these animals never appear to see where they place their feet. The next visitors to the pool were a noisy and restless flock of goats, of the small wiry Abyssinian breed. They were curiously marked with dark spots, stripes, and patches, on a light ground. Some of them were marked

with black, white and red. These flocks were tended by half-naked Danakil girls.

It was quite dark when we prepared to move off. As the ground appeared not to be difficult, as far as we had been able to see, we hoped to accomplish a good march during the night. There was no moon, but the starlight was sufficient to light us on the unbroken plain. We all marched on foot, so as to allow the sore backs of our mules to heal.

Leaving the pool, we made our way to the top of the basalt terrace, where all vegetation ended. We were glad to see that the rock was fairly level, for we had feared it might be fractured. When volcanic flows are much broken-up it is often exceedingly difficult to pass them, especially for soft-footed camels.

The jet-black mountains to the west were outlined by a thin rim of light, which appeared to separate them from the sky. Presently this gradually went out, and everything became merged in a single blue-black void, engulfing the earth and sky. Only the stars hung from base to summit of the infinite vault above us.

As we went picking our way steadily across the rocky plain we suddenly encountered a large caravan which had halted. It was composed of some two hundred and fifty mules. A group of men left their companions, who were engaged in unloading the animals, and came towards us. They saluted us, and we found they were Abyssinians on their way back to Awash, after a short journey to the eastward whither they had gone to procure salt. This they would dispose of at Awash, whence it would be distributed by railway and pack-mules to various places on the west of the Plateau. The source of the salt was located in Danakil tribal country, where the caravan was not allowed to pass. The Danakils had carried the bags of salt to the boundary of their territory, where they had been taken up by these Abyssinians.

While the men conversed with us their companions were preparing their camp, tethering the mules in lines, searching

for such firewood as was to be found on the stony plain. All around us in the darkness could be heard the sounds of voices and the clashing of iron implements, as their wielders chopped down the scrub.

These people travel in large companies, for the sake of mutual safety. They are well armed, and are continually on the look-out for signs of danger. They were delighted at the unexpected meeting with us, for the presence of white men gives these people a feeling of security. They begged and entreated us so persistently to stay and camp near them that night that at last we decided to do so. My two friends and I were not particularly pleased at the turn affairs had taken, as we had hoped to make a good march before daylight. But as we were at the beginning of our journey, and the tales of our new friends concerning recent massacres had somewhat scared our Plateau men, we thought it would be best to humour them. Our fellows were beginning to realize that the soil on which they now stood was Danakil territory beyond a doubt. These men whom we had met were countrymen of theirs; their talk was the talk of brothers. The news they brought was far from soothing to Galla and Amhara ears. Though we inwardly felt contemptuous at the signs of uneasiness displayed by our men, it would not have been wise to force them at that stage. We were at the beginning of our journey, our power over them was not yet firmly established, and they might take the first slight opportunity to desert us, and return with their new friends to the borderlands and their homes on the Plateau. On the morrow we should part company with the caravan, and once well launched on the dangerous seas of Danakil, our men would no longer think of swimming ashore, but would hold tightly to us for their lives.

As soon as we had intimated our intention to halt, the men of the caravan began to help ours in their various labours. Each appeared to be doing his utmost to show his pleasure at our having acquiesced in the demand to camp with them. They themselves had already lighted large fires, and posted

armed sentries. The mules were tethered beside the heaped salt-bags, and those of the men who were not working lay on matting spread on the ground behind, each man completely muffled in a blanket. They might have been mistaken for corpses awaiting burials, had it not been for the fact that they often turned over or moved from side to side, for no Plateau men can slumber at ease on Danakil soil.

Later, the chiefs of the caravan visited us with more formality, and seated themselves on the ground close to our camp-fire. We supposed that in half an hour their visit would come to an end, and that they would then withdraw to their own camp for the night. But instead they lingered on and on, talking about the roads and the animals and the natives of the country, with endless repetition, and occasionally throwing fresh fuel on our fire. I would have liked to request them to go, and I could see that my two companions were of a like mind, but such an insult would ill-become brothers of the road sharing the same toils and dangers. Besides, the fault of such incompatibility as existed was in ourselves: we were the strangers in their land, it was for us to conform to their ways as far as we conscientiously could. Fortunately, their ways were the ways of Nature, and we had no need to take pains to hide our weariness. We lay on our beds and frankly yawned at our visitors, letting them talk to their hearts' content. I imagine we should soon have fallen asleep under the influence of the intermittent droning conversation, but presently the good men awoke us into full consciousness by offering to arrange in our honour some sort of display. We sat up in bed to watch the entertainment.

Presently, against the background of the blazing fires, there advanced between two groups of armed men some fifty others, also armed. Those on the flanks were chanting a war-song, the guttural savage notes of which immediately impressed me with a sense of awe. One felt, under the influence of those wild sounds, that there is something ineradicably primitive and ferocious about the African, even though his country

may have been admitted into the League of Nations. The lust of blood seemed humming in that war-song.

The central group now advanced with a measured tread. They too were singing. Their half-naked black bodies, whereon the flames of the fires cast a red light, seemed like the forms of demons. Were they human beings in the understood sense of the word? Had they human souls? What civilized or gentle motive could possibly actuate such wild strange creatures as these?

More than once I involuntarily turned my head and looked uneasily behind me, although I was accustomed to such displays as that which now danced before my eyes. The close night, the lonely place, and the great fires that blazed around, combined to form a setting worthy of the strange unearthly performers who swayed and chanted there.

Now the central group, close-massed, approached to within two paces of the place where we reclined, halted for an instant, and then, at a signal from one of their number, wildly fell to leaping and gesticulating with all their limbs, frenziedly yelling their song the while. There they danced and howled, a terrifying wave of wiry bodies, uplifted thighs, quivering muscles, flinging arms, and hands grasping spears, crested with contorted faces, and eyes gleaming with the lust to kill. Higher and higher grew the frenzy as the assassins' dance went on. Dripping with the sweat of their strenuous exertions and communal excitement, the leaping bodies shone and darkened in the unsteady light cast by the fires. Their hot panting breath seemed to scorch my skin as I watched them. Suddenly there came a lull.

The horde stepped backwards, keeping their faces towards us, but all the while that hoarse singing went on. When they had retired to their former position between the flanking parties, they remained there some minutes, marking time with heavy feet. Then the black tide moved towards us as before, and again flung itself into that grim dance. Again and again the wave of wild men washed back and forth, as

if to seize and drag with it victims for some horrible sacrificial rite. They fell back for the last time, and that dance was ended.

Without delay they all formed in a ring, standing three deep. A lean fellow stepped into the midst of them, and began to leap and bound hither and thither, like some mechanical jumping toy. The others fell to singing a soft-toned refrain. All of a sudden, the dancer, without diminishing in the least his physical activities, began to yell strange words in a high loud voice. At intervals a repetition of more musical notes could be distinguished, but there was no pause in his movements. Sometimes he gathered his legs under him and bounded hither and thither in a series of springing jumps, resembling the bouncing of a rubber ball. At other times he would throw his shield or his rifle in the air, catching the object cleverly again. Then he would throw these things to one of the others, and taking up a spear he would flourish it wildly about his head. This went on for a long time. The man seemed to be possessed: as though nothing could ever make him still again. The crowd about him went on chanting in a low tone without pause. Presently our interpreter came whispering that he was describing the deeds of the departed heroes of his tribe. This was followed by words in praise of my two companions and me. We were likened to lamps, to lions, to birds that travel everywhere and see all things.

When the singer at last seemed about to fall exhausted on the ground, another man stepped into the ring and began to voice an ode of his own. For a moment they seemed to challenge and rival one another. Then the first singer suddenly drooped, like a defeated game-cock, yet still went on feebly jumping and grunting out his lay. In a moment more he fell senseless, and was dragged by his friends out of the ring.

The new songster now crowed out in the full power of his fresh voice, but his enthusiasm did not carry him to the same excesses as his predecessor had indulged in. This man

was followed by others, all of whom paid us extravagant compliments. Now and then a rifle-shot was discharged by somebody in the crowd, and after each report the waning excitement revived for a few moments. A patriotic song was sung with great enthusiasm by the whole assemblage: 'We are not afraid of the Danakils: we delight to die in our country's cause.' Perhaps they would not have sung this song so stoutly had they been ten miles further away from their own frontier. In all probability at that very moment some Danakil scout lay hidden amongst the nearby rocks, chewing his ball of tobacco and palm fibre, and muttering to himself as he fingered the hilt of his double-edged knife: 'I should like very much to kill you, one after the other.'

As the entertainment drew to a close, I presented the chief men with one of our bottles of brandy, and some money. After this they indulged in the general dance once more, and then withdrew, and the sound of their voices died away.

We rose two hours before daybreak in order to load the animals, and at dawn we moved off. The men of the mule caravan saluted us as we passed them. For some hours we continued to travel over the basalt where no vegetation of any sort was to be seen, but at last we came to the wavering uneven edge of the lava field. Here there were tufts of grass, and stunted bushes with gnarled horizontal branches bearing minute hard leaves which grew straight out, stemless, from the horny bark, a compromise, necessary in that harsh condition of nature, between leaf and thorn.

Presently we came to loose soil, as we left behind us the last of the plutonic rock. Grass covered the ground in patches, improving in condition and quantity as we advanced until it clothed considerable stretches without interruption — indicating slight depressions where the rain had gathered, and the soil remained moist long after the more elevated places had become completely dry. Some of the hollows were conspicuous for the unusually fine mimosas which were growing in them. The long elegant branches, flung out horizontally,

were covered with delicate fringes of foliage, and each tree was shaped like an umbrella. This is often the case with desert plants, whose branches contrive to cast the maximum shadow on the ground beneath them, in the attempt to mitigate the sun's heat on the earth in which their roots are seeking for moisture. The roots of such plants, too, strike deep into the soil in order to avoid the torrid conditions of the surface earth, baked hard and dry by the remorseless sun.

From the outstretched graceful arms of some of these mimosas vines hung down like the fringes of a Spanish shawl. The vegetation became thicker and thicker, and after a while we were gladdened by the sight of a few camels grazing in the plain. Soon we came amongst considerable herds of these animals. Many of them were stretching out their long necks in order to reach the branches of the trees, whence they nibbled the leaves and smaller twigs. Next we met other herds slowly marching towards Filoa to drink. It seemed that the peaceful neck-swinging animals went their way alone and unattended. Or if they were accompanied by herdsmen, the latter hid from our sight. We were glad to see so many camels, for we needed a few more of the animals for our own caravan. I felt certain that amongst such extensive herds we could hardly fail to find some trained pack-animals. As we proceeded flocks of goats and sheep appeared, and then I saw a group of huts in the shadow of a clump of large mimosas. These huts were constructed on a framework of long sticks, bent over in the form of an arch with both ends driven into the ground. Other sticks were laid on top of these, at right angles to them, and over the whole were thrown some lengths of coarse matting, held down by more sticks, or by clods of earth. Some of the huts had dry branches piled against the sides all round them, for the matting did not reach to the ground. This barrier kept out the goats. The huts were very small, merely some four or five feet high. There was scarcely room for two people in any of them.

Some of the younger women whom I saw were tall and

good-looking. They wore a loin-cloth, a few beads threaded on thongs round their necks, and brass anklets. The mothers of small children had the infant tied on their back. The old women were revoltingly ugly, flabby and covered with millions of wrinkles.

Eventually we saw in the distance the village of Wara Malka, close to the flank of a volcanic hill. It was dominated by a comparatively massive building, black as the lava rock on which it stood. This was a house which had been built by a German-Abyssinian family of Addis Ababa, named Hall.

We had decided to remain for at least two days at Wara Malka, in order to procure some more camels, and to put our caravan properly in order. Most of the loads were too heavy for the animals, but this had been unavoidable on account of the dearth of camels at Awash.

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*WARA MALKA TO THE
KABANNA*

WE came to the village, and immediately made our way to the house of the Halls. Two natives, man and wife, came out to greet us. They led us to the first floor, and told us we might occupy the whole of it. We preferred to take up our quarters on the thatched veranda however, as we were more likely to have the benefit of the breeze there than in the poorly ventilated house. Our animals were turned out to graze amongst the mimosas and acacias on the plain, which stretched below the knoll.

The house in which we now found ourselves had very thick walls, built of harsh volcanic stone. These stones were roughly bound together with mud. The house was square, and had the appearance of being an European building. It stood on the summit of a volcanic rise, most of which was enclosed by a high thick wall, partly fallen into ruin. The house was at the southern side of this surrounded space. Below it to the east, in the arid trough of a little valley, stood a few straw huts and near them tall, massive, circular walled enclosures. Into these folds the sheep and goats were driven at night, so that they might be protected from beasts of prey.

The lintel of the gateway of our yard was so low that we were obliged to dig earth away from the threshold before

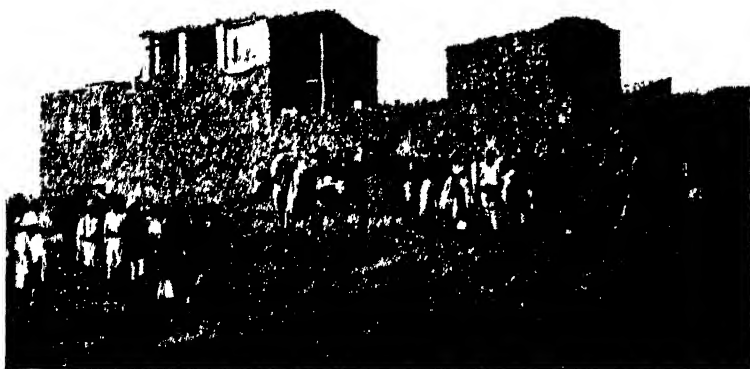
our loaded camels could pass underneath it. Besides the principal house there were two other buildings within the enclosure. One was a store-house, and the other was a stable, but both were half in ruins. The house itself was a large structure with a double row of rooms on the ground floor, divided by a passage. An outside stairway, made with unhewn rocks irregularly arranged, gave access to the upper story. The first-floor rooms had been erected on the central part only of the roof of the ground floor, thus leaving a sort of terrace at each end. One end had been thatched and screened with split reeds, forming a covered veranda. The last thing there appeared to be in the building was any promise of comfort, but two of the ground-floor rooms had been made habitable, and in them there lived a retired general of the Russian army. We did not meet the general, however, for he had gone to Dire Dawa, the frontier town between Abyssinia and French Somaliland, in order to purchase supplies and break the monotony of his solitary existence at Wara Malka. He was charged with the task of watching over a fruit garden, but this fruit garden was now a riotous jungle. Together with the tumble-down house, it was the surviving token of a courageous agricultural scheme, undertaken years before by a member of the Hall family. What amount of human strength and fixity of purpose could ever redeem such lands from the thralldom of the sun and disease, and a thriftless race of men?

A thin thread of water, all that remained at this season of the year of the river Kassam Bulga, wound its way across the plain below the house. Where visible, it glittered and sparkled in the sun like a string of diamonds flung down at irregular intervals. That flashing broken streak was responsible for the greenness of the neighbouring plain; it was responsible for the existence of the village, and for the presence of the herds of camels and the flocks of sheep and goats; it was responsible for the decaying house, and the wilderness-garden of the Halls. The very existence of that trickle on the surface



UNDER THE MIMOSA TREES AT FILOA

(See page 60)



THE HOUSE OF THE HALL FAMILY AT WARA MALKA

was proof of the more important fact that the ground beneath it was water-logged.

We were glad to find ourselves in the cool shadow of the homestead's thatch, for the march in the heat of the morning had tired us. Our men proceeded to store the baggage in the ground-floor rooms. The native farmer or caretaker brought us a rough table, the boards and legs of which had been clumsily shaped with a hatchet, and also some stools of similar manufacture. We supposed the Russian general had made this furniture himself. From the terrace, the farmer pointed out to us a thick blackish green patch of trees to the southward. This, he said, was the garden of the Halls. Even at that distance the different shades of the various trees could be distinguished. I had a great desire to see it.

Now the farmer's wife led four native girls up to us. Each carried a large flat basket, resting on the hip. The baskets were heaped with bananas, mangoes, oranges, and lemons, all freshly gathered from the distant garden. The sight of that profusion of beautiful fruit, offered to us by the four bashful girls, was delightful. Presently we were served with roast kid and lamb.

In the afternoon, when the heat began to subside, the chief representative of Abyssinian authority in the district came to call on us. He was an Amhara named Ibrahim, charged with the duty of collecting the taxes. His was a position of responsibility and danger, for in the event of a tribe refusing to pay its dues to the government Ibrahim must subdue that tribe by force of arms. Although the Danakil country belongs to Abyssinia the agents of the government are unable to penetrate into its deserts, except at the fringes. The brave and ferocious Danakils are in a continual state of contention with the government forces for possession of the borderlands lying between their tribal territories and the Plateau. In any given sector, sometimes the government and sometimes the Danakils hold the upper hand. Beyond the borderlands no government force ever dares to pass.

Wara Malka lay in the borderlands, and it was one of the few places which was firmly held by the government. Ibrahim was chiefly responsible for this state of affairs. His heart was in his work, for he hated the Danakils, and killed them on the slightest provocation. Victorious in more than one punitive expedition, Ibrahim had acquired the fame of a conqueror, and his name had become a terror to his enemies. A record of his life would indeed be a chapter of adventures, of savage fights, of hair-breadth escapes, of terrible massacres carried out in all sincerity and good faith.

Ibrahim is the only Amhara who has won my admiration, whom I remember as a personality. He was in the prime of manhood, and his carriage, the glance of his eye, his courteous manners, all bespoke him to be a leader of men, a sincere and fearless man. He had come to inquire as to whether he might render us any assistance. Unlike all his fellow-countrymen whom I have known, he did not ask for presents.

Another Abyssinian official came to pay his call. This was an effeminate creature, with long wavy hair reaching to his shoulders. Both he and his companion, for he came with a colleague, were dressed in spotless white chammas. He must have been the civil governor of the district. In him I recognized again the temporizing and crooked speech of the Ethiopian, which was conspicuously absent in the warrior, Ibrahim.

Lastly there came two Danakil chiefs, men with the vulture's gleam in their eyes. They wore nothing but a loin-cloth, and were thin, sinewy, and restless. In the borderlands men do not feel at ease. Neither can fat be accumulated where warfare is the principal occupation.

These two had come to Wara Malka to endeavour to make some arrangement with the authorities for postponement of the payment of certain dues which were to be levied on their tribe. The tax was to be paid in cattle, and would cripple the tribe for years, but these two emissaries had little hope of success. Their reserve reminded one of the Red Indian. They wore the sullen expression of men whose rights are being tam-

pered with, and who silently wait for vengeance. In their supple movements, as in the expression of their faces, there was a strong suggestion of the beast of prey.

At sunset the Plateau spurs were clearly visible to the west, against a background of diffused golden light. The atmosphere had become quite clear, free from the dust that had hung in it all day. This dust was drawn up by little whirlwinds, in columns which during the day could be seen all over the distant plain. Some of them were very long, reaching to an enormous altitude. The large quantity of dust thus drawn up from the earth was diffused throughout the atmosphere for miles around. But as the sun set the wind fell and the air became still, so that the dust settled slowly to earth again and the air became crystal-clear. In this fresh atmosphere we slept comfortably in our thatched veranda.

Next morning Ibrahim sent men with camels to us, and we purchased six of the beasts from him.

When the heat of the day had subsided I went with Pastori to bathe in the Kassam Bulga. Attended by a few armed men, we descended the lava knoll and came amongst the mimosas. The vegetation became denser as we approached the stream, and birds of beautiful plumage flew about us. Some of the larger trees were crowded with aigrettes; it was as though they were flowering with tufts of white cotton. I saw a tree bearing light green pods as large as a man's fist. They seemed to be filled with skeins of silky threads of a silvery hue and sheen. Antelopes and other animals ran in the clearings. We came to a broad pool in the river-bed, which was strewn with white pebbles. Several other pools were visible both upstream and down, and beside these or in them I saw, in addition to camels and goats, antelopes, flights of birds, and parties of monkeys, drinking or playing. A mile or more downstream the river described a wide curve, and then disappeared in the jungle.

After bathing we turned back, followed by our men, who kept close to us like children. Presently we saw an artificial

channel, which led water from a dammed portion of the stream in the direction of the garden planted by the Halls. We followed this furrow, and came presently to a gigantic hedge or bulwark of impenetrable vegetation, some thirty feet high and sixty feet thick. This surrounded the orchard or garden, a dense wood of closely planted trees. The tree-tops showed above the encompassing hedge, and we saw many fine mangoes, oranges, and lemons, hanging from the branches. We encircled the place until we found the entrance. It was a tunnel through the great hedge. Two natives made their appearance, and put themselves at our disposal as guides. We found that the straight central avenue was still fairly clear of undergrowth, but the side-paths and smaller avenues had almost entirely disappeared from sight, obliterated under the mounting tide of weeds and creepers which had forced its way in every direction. It had even climbed up the tree-trunks in some places and shut out the light of the sun. The ground was littered with fallen fruit, and there were young trees of a preternatural slenderness and height, youthful shoots standing a-tiptoe, as it were, trying to reach their heads into the life-giving light of the sun. Among the trees which had been originally planted, I saw some of an extraordinary size for their species. I had never before seen familiar sorts of trees grown so huge, and their trunks so thick. Pastori and I walked in the semi-obscurity, half suffocated by an atmosphere heavily impregnated with the scents of fruits and blossoms. We found that each kind of tree had a place of its own, though the outlines of the various divisions had become blurred by reason of the unchecked growth that had taken place. The oranges, lemons, and limes were excellent, but the coffee and cotton plants were hardly to be distinguished from the mass of weeds which wantoned everywhere.

When we had returned to the house I set to work to make a branding-iron with which to brand our camels, so that in the event of any of them running away, or being stolen, we might have a better chance of tracing and recovering them.

Using a hard stone as an anvil and another as a hammer, I shaped a branding instrument from a piece of iron which I had found half-buried in the floor of the store-room in the compound. Settie kept the fire going while I fashioned the tool, and when I had finished he expressed his entire satisfaction with the result.

We spent another night on our veranda, and on the morrow we were ready to take our departure at an early hour. We had twenty-one camels now and there were two more men to assist Settie in his duties, besides another man for our personal service. Our departure was hindered, however, by the arrival of two Danakil chiefs. We had to show them some civility, and also give them presents. Rosina, who always resented any interference or hitch in a pre-arranged plan, was highly incensed at this delay. Nevertheless, he was obliged to unload one of the camels and open some boxes which were in his care, in order to get out suitable presents for our visitors. Then he had to find our bottle of brandy, so as to give our guests a drink. Finally, when the good Danakils had taken their departure, he was able to attend to the repacking of his boxes. Rosina was a wonderful packer; nothing ever broke or was lost if he had packed it, neither did he ever leave anything behind at a halting-place. In fact, he often added to our store: at Wara Malka he had extracted two bottles of lemon juice from the fruit of the orchard.

At last we were able to move away, accompanied by the deep bows of the farmer, his wife, and nearly the whole population of the village. We left a letter of thanks for the Russian general whose house we had invaded in his absence.

Having passed through the gate, we descended the lava hill and got into the sparse wood. We looked back once or twice to catch a glimpse of the black homestead which had sheltered us for the last two days. Soon we reached the gravelly bed of the Kassam Bulga. So shallow was its water that in crossing it we barely wetted our feet. But here yet two more Danakil chiefs awaited us. They had heard of our arrival in the land,

and of the journey we proposed to make, and they had come to offer us the services of a guide whom they had brought with them. It also gave them the opportunity, though they did not say so, of accepting any presents which might be forthcoming from us. We accepted the services of the guide, and suitably rewarded his two principals.

Our plan was to travel as straight as possible through the parched flat lands that extended in a north-easterly direction from the Kassam Bulga to the Awash river, so as to reach the latter as quickly as possible. Thenceforward we proposed to follow the course of the Awash closely, so as to see as much as possible of its broad shallow valley. Being near this large stream, our minds would be easy on the score of water, pasturage, and game for the cooking-pots of ourselves and our men. The last was a most important point, for we had reduced our loads to the last possible degree at the outset. Our intention was to follow the river down to the Aussan Sultanate, where it loses itself in the sands of the desert.

Our new guide wanted us to bear to the north, and keep to the foot of the hills where the Plateau finally sinks into the Danakil plain. But we ourselves had planned differently. What we wanted to do was to get into the very middle of the Danakil territory, and travel northward through the heart of the unknown country. We had no intention of keeping to the spurs of the Plateau. It was clear that the guide had been instructed by his chiefs to conduct us through the borderlands, where the power of the Abyssinian government prevails, so that the risk of attack on our caravan might be averted. In the larger view of a chief we were no doubt troublesome people, almost certain to bring on them the punitive measures of the Abyssinian government, so soon as the inevitable had happened and we had been maltreated by some of their tribesmen. To the ordinary tribesman we were a perfect Godsend. We represented sport, loot, infidel scalps, and honour, all in the highest degree. We were no penurious salt-gatherers or traders. It will easily be seen, then, why a chief with his larger

view would be likely to try to keep us out of danger, in so far as his own tribe was concerned.

The guide tried several times to alter our course to the northward, without saying anything to us, but we promptly checked him on each occasion. Then he began to talk, saying that he knew the best way and that we ought to follow his recommendations. We merely told him that he could either guide us whither we wanted to be guided, or else take himself off. If he wanted to earn his thalers he must find us a path straight across the desert plain, so as to bring us to the Awash as soon as possible. Had we been without a guide it would have made little difference to us, for we could hardly have missed our objective. Sooner or later we were bound to come to some part of the Awash, which flowed from south to north somewhere to the eastward of where we were. Yet we did not disguise from ourselves the fact that the man might be very useful to us in helping us to avoid obstacles, such for instance as certain great patches of thorn-bushes, often covering many acres, which have to be negotiated. On meeting with one of these one may spend hours in trying to find the best way round, for it is impossible to traverse such mazes. Then there is a good deal of ground with deep fissures in it in these regions. If a camel gets one foot in one of these cracks he will almost certainly break his leg, and must then be destroyed. An intelligent guide will keep a caravan clear of all such dangers. Another occasion on which a guide can be of the utmost value is when deciding on a place in which to camp for the night. In such a country as that in which we were travelling, where water and pasturage are scarce, it is highly desirable to make one's halts near good water and pasturage as often as possible. Only a man exceedingly well-acquainted with the country can ensure that this is done.

When our guide began to understand us better, and found out that we were not altogether new to this sort of travelling, that we were not likely to quarrel wantonly with the Danakils nor maltreat our men, and that we were not lacking in tact,

he became more easy in his mind. Thereafter he steadily followed the direction we had instructed him to take. At first the landscape was distinctly arid, but after a few hours' travelling we came to signs of vegetation again.

Even the slightest growth of grass or scrub is comforting to the traveller in these droughty countries, for it is a sign that this world is not entirely without moisture. For the same reason one watches for animals and birds, as a further denial of the lifelessness of one's surroundings.

As the vegetation increased birds became more numerous, and a number of jackals were sighted within rifle-range. In the fierce heat of noon we came to the watercourse of Kabanna. There was no stream flowing at this season, but there were a few water-holes in its bed. The Kabanna rises in the plateau and joins the Awash.

We brought the caravan across the river-bed, and unloaded it on the further bank, under a clump of mimosa trees. Immediately, everybody was roused into cheerful activity. Some of the men ran for water, others spread amongst the trees to collect firewood. Within a minute, the two guinea-fowl which we had shot in the morning were being prepared for the table. The cook seized the head-rope of the kitchen-camel, and led him to the spot in which he had decided to pitch his kitchen. Other men helped him to carry stones on which to place the pots. The cook's mate was Joseph, a French Somaliland boy whom we had found stranded at Wara Malka, a shred of some disbanded or wrecked caravan. Settie was busy with his camels.

During these preparations Rosina was in a constant bustle, pulling and carrying things here and there, ordering the men to set the table here, no, there! telling them where to unload the camels which carried the famous boxes containing our valuables. Rosina always had many excuses as to why he wanted the boxes in a particular place, he wanted to use them as chairs or as a table: but the boys knew well enough that the old man merely wanted to have the valuables close under his eye. The folding table, our only real luxury, was set up

and securely wedged in the coolest shade. The chipped enamel plates and mugs were placed on the table, together with our tin spoons and forks. Pack-boxes were placed for seats, and a few sacks were spread on the ground, so that we might recline there until the meal was ready.

After lunch we remained in the shade of the trees for a while, and at sunset we moved off again. It still took us two hours to load the animals and get started. Two of the Eritreans had fallen sick. One of them, Abulker, the one-eyed elderly cook, was in a grave condition. These men came from the sea coast at Massowa, but of late they had been at Addis Ababa, at an altitude of ten thousand feet above sea level. The difference in temperature and in the density of the atmosphere between these two places had proved disastrous to their constitution. Now that they had returned to the hot plains they had fallen sick with fever. We made them ride on the two available mules, but they could do no work. This affected our efficiency, as we had made no allowance for spare hands.

As the sun set we left the Kabanna, and directed our march towards the north-east. The sparse vegetation gradually disappeared, and we found ourselves in the open desert. We came to a stony steppe, where we halted and prepared our camp for the night. The animals were tied in lines so that they should not wander in search of food and water. In that desolate place they were obliged to go without either.

Everybody was tired, and we made no effort to have food cooked, neither did the men light fires. After making a quick meal of what we had saved from the midday halt, we lay down to sleep under the stars.

DOBBI FAGHE ON THE AWASH

WE rose from our uncomfortable resting-place at the first sign of dawn, for we had an urgent need to find water and pasturage for our animals as soon as possible. While we were making our preparations for departure, the Danakil guide showed signs of dissatisfaction. Presently he sent Abdul Kader to protest to us that we ought to allow ourselves to be led by our guide along the route recommended by the chiefs, for the natives of these parts were hostile to strangers, and so on. We gave him to understand again that either he complied with our orders to find us a fair path in the direction we wanted, or, failing that, he was at liberty to go away, for we could manage quite well without him. He squatted on the ground, and sulkily watched our preparations to leave. When he overheard our orders to Settie, to head north-east, and saw that we were actually moving in that direction, he became very uneasy and followed us, muttering.

That man was like a distracting buzzing mosquito, exasperating our minds, so we gave him a few thalers for his useless services during the twenty-four hours he had accompanied us, and told him we needed him no longer. He immediately sped away in the opposite direction, without saying a word. No doubt he would make all speed to report himself to his chiefs, and to tell them that we were stubborn men to deal with.

For some hours our way led across ground entirely barren,

and then traces of vegetation gradually appeared. In the distance we could see the blue-grey streak which represented the river forest. Yet on approaching the fringe of the jungle we found no green mimosas or ash-blue tamarisks singing in the wind, neither were there living acacias nor thorn bushes growing there. What we found was a dead forest, a mass of dried-up rigid wood, with shrivelled limbs flung motionless against the sky. The branches and boles of the trees were split, and shattered, and lifeless. These remnants stood, like the decayed remains of some huge maze-like palisade, in an impenetrable spread of fallen branches, massed together and stacked high, undergoing slow decay. Flights of doves, on their way to the river, would sometimes stay awhile to rest on the funereal branches, silent, as though the lugubrious scene were too sad to allow them to coo.

With lowered heads and bent shoulders, we moved on through the endless mazes. Now and then one of our men would give vent to a piercing cry or a repressed gasp, as a steel-hard thorn penetrated deep into his foot. Though generally walking barefoot, all had been provided with sandals to ease their passage over the hot stones, but sandals were an insufficient protection against the thorns of such a path as we were now pursuing. As for ourselves, being provided with long boots or leggings, we could walk in such places with greater ease, but our hands were cut and lacerated frequently, and our clothes were torn to rags. The unfortunate camels suffered painfully, and laboured forward with a continuous growling which sounded almost human. However, we pressed steadily forward, confident that sooner or later we should come into the green vegetation which borders the river's course.

The anxiety and misery which this woeful zone had flung on us, and on our animals, gave way to unbounded relief when we at last saw the first signs of living plants. These forced their way through the layer of dead wood wherever it left little clear spaces. This green vegetation gradually in-

creased until it grew complete all about us, and we found ourselves in the full splendour of the forest's verdure and shade. We came to within a few yards of the banks of the Awash, and stopped in a natural clearing, amid enormous trees which entirely shut out the fiery rays of the sun. The gentle subdued light quickly cooled our bodies, and soothed our aching eyes. Our Wara Malka men informed us that this district was known as Dobbi Faghe.

Settie and his men began to unload the beasts, all rejoicing at having found this good camping-ground. Pastori and I pushed forward into the thick jungle, in order to find out exactly where the river was. Suddenly, through the intricacies of the vegetation, we saw it, deeply set between high vertical banks. The water, flowing noiselessly, was turbid, showing that rain had fallen recently in the regions upstream. This alarmed us, for we had hoped that the rainy season was yet distant.

Rosina, as ever, was giving himself much trouble to see that everything was placed according to his own plan; his famous treasure-boxes piled together close to the place where we three were to esconce ourselves. He issued the flour ration to the men, and then went round to their separate groups, for they always arranged themselves according to their creeds, so that they might cook and eat together without defilement, and distributed some additional luxuries. These the men received with various signs of humility and thankfulness, according to the customs of the several races.

Meanwhile, Settie was yelling to his men to take the camels down to the water as fast as they were unloaded. He bade them follow the mules, which had already found their way to the river's brink. There is no animal cleverer than the mule in finding its way to water.

The sick men reclined in the shadow of a large tree. The remainder, divided into groups, were cooking their engera on concave iron plates. This engera is a sort of unleavened bread which is generally made with millet meal. A loose paste

is made of this meal mixed with water, and a handful of it having been spread in a thin layer on the iron dish is put over the fire to cook, the iron dish resting on three stones or pieces broken from ant-hills with the fire in the midst of them. The paste quickly dries, and within a couple of minutes the bread is ready — that is, when a slight charring begins to show on the under side at the edges. It is then time to take up this simple stuff, which in appearance resembles a round piece of brown blotting-paper, full of little holes left by the air-bubbles. The baking is quickly repeated, until a stack of these sheets has been prepared. They should be eaten fresh, as they are apt to turn sour if kept for more than a day.

Game was plentiful about our camping-place, and before the midday meal we killed two bucks, one for the Christians and one for the Muslims. This was for the avoidance of dissatisfaction and quarrelling, because usually whenever we shot any game a race ensued between the followers of the two religions, in an endeavour to be the first to touch the fallen prey. If a Christian succeeded in touching it first it immediately became unclean to the Muslims, and was accordingly left entirely to the former. On the other hand, if a Muslim was the first to touch it then no Christian would think of eating any part of it. Consequently we were drawn into religious matters to the extent that we made a habit of trying to ensure that the meat was divided with some sort of equity. Sometimes we would restrain a fleet runner, the followers of whose creed had of late benefited somewhat too often, and thus give a man of the other faith an opportunity to overtake and pass him, and so be the first to touch the fallen venison. Neither party would eat boar's flesh, or any sort of bird. As for ourselves, we suffered from no prejudices, meat touched by any sort of zealot was food for us.

Our cook had fallen ill, and so the interpreter took charge of his duties. But the interpreter was a Muslim, and consequently whatever was left over from our kitchen was fit for the consumption of Muslims only. That is to say that if, be-

sides having been prepared in the kitchen by the Muslim cook, it had also been originally touched or butchered by a Muslim, then it was fit to be consumed by true believers. But if it had been butchered by a Coptic Christian, even though it had been cooked by the Muslim cook, then the remainder left by us had to be thrown away. In this last case the meat was originally clean and permitted to Christians, having been butchered by a Copt, but it had subsequently been rendered unclean and unlawful by having been handled and cooked by a Muslim. In this way excellent roasted joints, often sufficient to satisfy half a dozen hungry men, were flung away, the ignorant followers of two simple and spiritual doctrines preferring to eat engera rather than touch them. Fortunately, they felt certain that on the morrow of any of these lenten days, or at the worst on the next day after, they would, with due care, have another opportunity of filling themselves with an abundance of uncontaminated meat. The forest was so rich in game that it made full provision for the indulgence of the most subtle and uncompromising distinctions.

In the afternoon Pastori and I with two of the men went out to shoot again. Stalking proved difficult, for the vegetation was everywhere thick and close. Before I had gone five hundred yards my shirt was as ragged as a banana leaf which has been whipped by a strong wind. Occasionally we approached the river, and found it sunk some thirty feet below us. For the most part the banks were abrupt and vertical, but where they had subsided we were able to reach the water's edge, and rest in the shadow of the overhanging tamarisks.

Wild life teemed in the forest; there were antelopes, water-buck as large as mules, guinea-fowl, doves, aigrettes, and many other sorts of birds. Close to the river there were many crocodiles basking in the sun. They looked like logs of wood left by an ebbing tide, as they lay, lined up and asleep, with their heads nearest to the water. Whenever we hurried down the slope a general rush would take place, and a repetition of heavy thuds and splashes would break the

calm of the smooth muddy stream. Perhaps one of the reptiles, a sound sleeper, or one that had climbed higher than the rest or had been basking in a steeper place, or perhaps rendered lethargic by a recent heavy meal, on realizing that a stampede was occurring, would throw itself with a jump into the water below. The flat belly of the horny brute would then come in contact with the water with a loud report.

Sometimes we would come to the water's edge as noiselessly as possible, and look quickly in every direction, upstream, downstream, and opposite, so as to see the picture of the wild life which, unaware of our presence, stood or moved unsuspectingly revealed to us. There were many crocodiles basking in the sun. Others swam lazily below the surface of the water, occasionally raising their heads so that their eyes alone rose above the surface, allowing them to survey the river and its banks. Those eyes were like two bottle corks floating together, but they peered in an ugly way like a submarine periscope. The reptiles would float so that their horny backs remained only a fraction of an inch below the surface, and the running stream showed ripples over the bossy scales. Then the terrible beast would submerge itself entirely, hardly disturbing the water with the least splash. They produce an uneasy feeling in a man, even as do their cousins the snakes.

The hippopotamus afforded altogether a different spectacle. Blowing up a thick fountain of water, and snorting ponderously, they raise out of the slow current the end of their heavy muzzle. So they remain for the few seconds which suffice them to take in a supply of fresh air. Then they sink to the bottom of the river again, with motions which churn up and make waves on the surface of the water. Sometimes they show their eyes, ridiculously small, but if they see something strange, especially a man, for it is man's sad privilege to scare the rest of creation as soon as he appears on the scene, they will at once sink in disorder, amid a threshing of the water. Bubbles continue to rise long after the surface has resumed its sluggish calm, indicating that the colossal creature

below has not yet recovered his peace of mind. There is something lovable about the hippopotamus, as about all vegetarian animals, even as there is a touch of suspicion in our regard of all carnivorous beasts.

Watching crocodiles is no mean entertainment, as when under the opaque water they stealthily approach an animal which they have espied drinking at the water's edge. The crocodile suddenly makes a spring, often with half its body out of the water, gives a lightning twist to its head so as to bring the awful gaping jaws vertical, and seizes its prey. Before the latter knows what has attacked it, it has already been dragged under water. In the deep, on the mud of the river bottom, a fierce fight follows as other crocodiles come to tear the prey from its captor. The water above them seems to boil, and a streak of blood slips downstream on the flood.

When these great reptiles are at their siesta, basking in the sun with their eyes shut and their mouths wide open, a little bird flutters about their terrible teeth, pecking here and there at bits of flesh which have stuck between the glassy fangs. The frail flutterer, the size of a sparrow, vanishes in the shadow of the brute's gums, and every now and then it reappears, perching on the ridge of teeth and merrily skipping about under the yellow dome of the palate. So it flies to another gaping mouth, or goes to wipe its beak, sitting on the skull scales of its benefactor.

We shot a few animals that day, in order to try our rifles. Being accustomed to jungle life, we usually refrained from killing except for food. We had secured our fire-arms at Addis Ababa, and as they were in a bad state of repair we were anxious to ascertain how far they were to be relied upon. We now marked the better ones with a deep groove, gouged out with a knife in the stock, so that even at night we might be able to find them by touch.

On leaving the river we took to a path which had been made in the forest by hippopotami. Without this path we should have found it almost impossible to penetrate through

the dense jungle close to the river bank, so close were the trees and so thick the undergrowth that filled the space under their branches. Further from the river the vegetation became rather less dense, and here hundreds of guinea-fowl and doves were congregated. In fact, judging by the noise they made, there may have been thousands of the birds there. Several black snakes slithered away as we advanced.

At this point the river flowed close to the base of some volcanic hills. Consequently the forest belt was here narrow. We soon came to the open, and began to climb the first boulders of the nearest hill. The rock was trachytic, and whenever small pieces of it knocked together under our feet they made a ringing metallic tinkle. The heat was intense; our hands, arms, and necks were scratched in every part; we were considerably fatigued, for it had been stifling in the forest, and even beside the river no breeze stirred; yet on beholding the hills above us, Pastori and I wanted to view the surrounding country from their top.

Not a blade of grass grew on the steep slopes, in striking contrast with the low ground beneath them, which was entirely covered with rank vegetation. As we approached nearer and nearer to the summit, we could see more and more of the Awash winding through the plain, accompanied by the broad green strip of the forest. Beyond, the parched desert stretched to the uttermost limit of vision. Looking upstream, we could still discern the edges of the lava field, which extends to the gorge at Awash; while in the opposite direction we could see traces of the vegetation accompanying a tributary of the Awash. Presently we descended the hill and climbed another near it, from which a better view was to be obtained. From this point I was able to continue the topographical survey which I had commenced at Awash, and added to at favourable moments since.

We descended the western side of the hill, and came to the dead jungle which we had traversed in the morning. We were somewhat tired after the day's exertions. Pastori and I each

carried a rifle, one of the boys carried two rifles, and the other carried a young buck which we had shot. We began to think with pleasant anticipation of our camp, and to visualize ourselves as sitting down to the evening meal with Rosina. These happy thoughts, however, were dashed from our minds when, on coming to the green forest, we were met by one of our men who told us hesitatingly that two of our mules had disappeared. He was there with some of the other boys, looking for the animals.

It was a serious matter to lose two of our four mules, especially at the beginning of our journey. We entertained little hope of recovering them through the efforts of our servants, for they were scared out of their wits as soon as they got a few hundred yards away from camp. They knew that the Danakils were no contemptible foes, and the thick cover afforded by the vegetation naturally increased their apprehension. We collected them as we went along, and they followed us with such evident signs of relief on their faces that our vexation was turned to secret mirth. The kind of search they were carrying out was in any event useless, for they all remained close together in order to be protected by one another. We lectured them, to little purpose I am afraid, for fear cannot easily be controlled. It was now becoming dark, and nothing was to be gained by remaining out in the woods any longer. We decided to organize a systematic search on the morrow. There being abundant pasturage and water all along the forest belt, our runaways might have stayed there happily for the remainder of their lives, until wild beasts put an end to them.

Night had fallen, and we had already dined, when it occurred to us to send two men back along the track to Wara Malka, in case the mules had retraced their steps towards that place. We called two of the Wara Malka men from their fire-side, and told them to follow the trail back, if necessary as far as the Halls' homestead. We would remain where we were for two days. The two men left soon afterwards, and we dis-



FORDING THE AWASH AT DOBBI FAGHE

posed ourselves to sleep. There was little talking that night beside the boys' fires, for everybody was aware that in case of sickness there would be no mule to ride. The sick would have to be transported on camel-back, where the jolting is apt to increase one's ills. In fact our chief reason for bringing mules was that we might use them for ambulance work.

On the morrow, Pastori and I set out with a few of the men to make a local search. We had no success, however.

As evening approached we took a shower-bath at the river's edge. We deemed it too risky to go into the water, with so many crocodiles there. Even the filling of a bucket must be done with caution, and one cannot allow one's animals to drink direct from the stream. A small furrow or trench, a few yards long, is dug on the shore parallel to the river and about a yard from it. The river water floods this trench, and the animals drink from it.

In places where the shore was narrow and the stream flowed close to the vertical bank, many snake-like roots grew from the top of the bank and reached to the water below, completely barring our path. We were obliged to creep through these in order to pass them. The knots of contorted roots had been exposed by the subsidence of the soil. There were also fallen trees, the tops of which were half-submerged in the water. They continued to live, anchored to the bank with doubled-up roots, some of which had snapped or dried up. Others, more pliant, had adapted themselves to the different conditions in which they found themselves, thickening in parts, or growing humps where the wood had split.

We came to the path of the hippopotamus again, which led to the place of our encampment, and felt thankful to the river-horse for making it. The clumsy beasts, coming out of the river at night to graze in the grass patches in the forest, make for themselves tunnels through the thick vegetation. They appear to keep to the same place; each has his regular paths and clearings, and is jealous of the intrusion of others. When the river is as high as the rim of the bank, the hippo-

potamus merely has to step out of the water on to terra firma and go to his meadow. As the river becomes lower and lower however, he is obliged to climb more and more in order to reach his pasture. In doing this he gradually forms a sloping passage with vertical sides, which lead straight from the edge of the water to the level of the top of the bank. One of these steep ramps, covered overhead by the network of growing branches, was the link between our camp and the river. We had in fact taken up our quarters on a hippopotamus's grass-patch without thinking of the owner's possible irritation. In that thick forest it would have meant very hard work to clear a space for ourselves. We trusted that the big river-horse would overlook us.

We had hoped that on our return to camp we might find the strayed mules there, but in this we were disappointed. We set ourselves to await the return of the two Wara Malka men, when we would continue our journey, hoping to meet a caravan or some plunderers who had mules to barter, from whom we might obtain animals to replace those we had lost. We had little hope of seeing our own mules again.

In the night I suddenly woke, and after listening intently for a few moments I roused the camp with my yells of delight. I had heard the sound of hooves, trotting at no great distance. The gait was that of the small mountain mules such as ours. I rose, thrust my feet into long boots, wrapped a towel round my loins, for I slept without any sort of clothing in the heat, and stood waiting for the animals to come nearer. I felt they could be none other than our own mules, and in fact within a few minutes they had arrived in our clearing. The fires were immediately poked into a blaze that we might the better see and hear what had happened.

We learnt that the mules had travelled all the way back to Wara Malka, the stables of which they had evidently appreciated. In fact, a villager had found them grazing near the Halls' garden, and had taken charge of them. On the return journey, our servants had ridden fast in order to save time,

and enable us to leave the camp next morning. This was an instance of thoughtfulness such as we should never have expected. It completely confounded some of the other men, who had insinuated that if our envoys were to find the mules they would keep them, and we should see nothing more of men or animals.

Rosina opened our treasury, and counted out to each of the two men a handful of shining thalers, their promised reward, and additional coins also, beyond what had been promised them. The two men, very happy now, squatted near the fire, and passed their glittering coins continually from their right hand to their left and back again, as though they would never grow weary of looking at and fingering the big silver pieces. The other men, some a little envious of their good fortune, gathered in a circle round them, and they would have sat on talking until dawn. The slightest occurrence leads to endless prattle with these people, and they eke out their enjoyment by lazily poking the fire at intervals, or throwing on it fresh twigs or pieces of wood. So they continue talking interminably, making a monotonous droning that to us would seem fitter to send one to sleep than to keep one awake.

We allowed them a few minutes of this pastime, and then told them to lie down and sleep, for on the morrow at day-break we intended to resume our march.

TO UNTE AND KORTUMI

WE had already discovered a good ford a little downstream of our camping place, and accordingly we crossed the river without difficulty or delay. The two Wara Malka Danakils were the first to take to the water; next came we three Europeans, mounted on mules led by our boys; and finally the string of camels passed over. We found the river was not very deep, and the loads were scarcely touched by the water. On the opposite bank, we immediately found ourselves in a forest as thick as that which we had just left. We had difficulty in finding a passage, for the bulky loads of the camels frequently became immovably fixed between the trees, or struck the branches overhead. Sometimes the horizontal limbs would yield a little to the pressure of the heavy load, allowing the camel which bore it to take a few more steps forward; but if the vegetation ahead became thicker still it was often necessary to retreat. On this being tried, it would be found that the branches which had yielded to the camel's passage in one direction would not permit the animal to pass the opposite way. Then the camels, unable to move, and growling their dissatisfaction, had to be unloaded, and the bags and boxes carried some distance by the men, until ultimately they were reloaded beyond the obstructing thicket, and the march was resumed. From this cause we lost a good deal of time.

There were many wild boars in this part of the forest, and

sometimes a particularly truculent one, with prominent tusks and mane erect, would stand squarely with his fore legs apart to watch us defiantly at a few feet's distance. So he would stand for some seconds, and then, seized by sudden fear, he would vanish like lightning, and could be heard grunting and snorting in the undergrowth as he retreated. Sows would pass, breathing heavily behind a farrow of sucklings, the snapping of twigs and the crackling of dead brushwood under their feet telling of their hurry and agitation.

Antelopes and water-buck were numerous in the open patches of the wood, where they remained grazing, indifferent to the camels. But the moment a man appeared before them they were seized with instant panic. Birds of brilliant plumage preened their feathers overhead, and monkeys raced along the branches, shaking down a shower of dry leaves.

To our immense relief, the forest gradually became less dense, and the thorny scrub which followed was more and more stunted and sparse. At last the parched and empty desert shimmered in front of us once more. We were glad to see it again, in spite of the sun's unmitigated heat, which seemed to rebound from the earth, striking us under the brows, the chin, and the nostrils. Here we were at least free from the thorns, all manner of which grew in the forest. Some of them were so small as to be almost invisible, but they stuck on one's hands in hundreds, looking like a dark smudge on the skin. Others were thick hooked spikes which, no matter how you might try to avoid them, would always catch and tear something. Then there were thorns which grew in clusters, radiating from a common centre. Every conceivable design seemed to have been studied and experimented with by that unfriendly flora, to prevent access to its domain.

Our satisfaction at having reached the open wilderness did not last very long, however, for we soon came to a black soil which aroused unpleasant expectations. In fact the ground soon became broken by thousands of fissures and crevices. This was the bottom of a dried-up pool or lake, extending

over several square miles. The dried deposit of slime or mud was marked in every direction by broad and deep gashes. As the camels came on this dangerous place, we held our breath at every step they took. The animals stumbled hither and thither, and regained their balance with fearful efforts. Often they stopped and stood groaning, afraid to move a step further. There was not a single square yard free from fissures capable of breaking their legs. The men had to use the utmost care, and exert themselves strenuously, in order to get our camels across the treacherous ground, for camels never look where they are placing their feet; they drag them along as though they were not part of their bodies at all. The surface of the soil was friable; it curled up and broke under our feet with a sound as of munched biscuits. This friability caused the edges of the gaps to break under the slightest pressure. Three camels soon fell lame, and the breaking of legs was expected at every moment.

I glanced back, with the idea that it might be advantageous to retrace our steps. But that would have meant many extra miles added to our journey, and who could tell which way the dry lake stretched? It was so shallow that the eye could hardly distinguish even its nearer boundary. On the horizon to our right the forest belt showed like a thin blue line under the yellowish grey of the sky. We had longed to get to the open desert, and this was what we had found there. Yet the broken ground could not fail to come to an end somewhere. The heat was against us, and to lengthen our march at that hour of the day, by circling round the impediment, would have necessitated labouring under heart-breaking conditions. We reviewed every aspect of the situation, and finally agreed to continue forward, trusting to God that the end would be favourable. Since leaving the forest, our goal had been a gap in the vegetation-belt, where the river took a turn, in the far distance. We had noted this land-mark from the summit of the hill on the preceding evening. We felt sure that there was a ford at that point, because the interruption in the vegeta-

tion pointed to there being rocky ground which the trees had not succeeded in rooting upon. It should be possible to pass over the rapids of this stony rib, safe from the attacks of crocodiles.

Keeping to our original plan, we directed our course towards the gap, describing a chord to the arc made by the great curve of the river on our left hand. The camels wailed sadly, but by dint of coaxing we made them start again. Camels understand the tones of human speech better than many other animals. When one has been brought much in contact with them, and has shared to some extent their primitive life, one realizes the degree of understanding which can be reached between man and these patient animals which share his toils.

Our poor camels pluckily struggled onward, fell frequently, were unloaded and again reloaded, and at last, after some hours of suspense and anxiety, the dangerous place was passed in safety. It was a curious sight to see the leading animals, standing on firm ground at last, turn to look back at the last of the caravan, and watch, with amused or supercilious curiosity, their struggles to reach safety too. Then the column continued its march, and each camel resumed in peace the ceaseless slow, left to right and right to left, grinding of its jaws. The march went on with a measured swing, the test of its steadiness being the pacing forward without breaking the coupling ropes which connect the halter or lower jaw of each camel to the tail of its predecessor in the line. A few of the animals were lame, but the casualties were negligible compared to what we had feared, or would have been willing to pay in order to get clear of that creviced death-trap.

We were now approaching the arboreal belt again, and as we came to the first thorny thickets we were met by two Danakils, armed with lance and knife. The two savage creatures fled when we advanced towards them, though they had lingered for a few seconds to look intently at us, as a jackal might have done. But the sight of them, even for those brief

moments, was quite sufficient to make our men bunch together under the sudden reminder that danger was ever lurking near them in this wild country. We three Europeans exchanged smiles to see how much tamer our gang was becoming at every further remove from civilization. Our Addis Ababa men, city fellows, were now seeing the real Danakil in the bush, and some of them perhaps were trying to forget that they had so eagerly joined in the blood-curdling chorus of the mule-caravaners at Filoa.

At last we reached the gap in the forest, where we stopped and had the animals unloaded. The mimosas were few, and offered little shade, but close to the bank of the river we found a thick bush, as big as a cottage and free from thorns. We set two men to clear a passage to its centre with hatchets, and thus made a perfect bower to rest in. It was pleasant to find oneself, after the arduous march, in that cool shadow, and to hear the river mutter and murmur below us as it ran over the stones. As we had surmised, the stony ribs crossed from bank to bank, being silvered with shallow rapids. A little way downstream the earthen bank had subsided, and this afforded easy access to the river for our animals. On that spot the footprints of sheep and goats were numerous, from which we gathered that the place was used by the nomads for watering the cattle which grazed in the adjacent forest. We were therefore in hourly expectation of a visit from tribesmen, but they delayed to come. Where it was barred across by the volcanic rocks which made the rapids, the river was broad. It was fordable at several points, but we judged the best place to be immediately below the natural dam. The first thing to do on resuming our march would be to cross to the other side of the river, for the general course of the Awash now seemed to be too far to the right. It would have been almost impossible for us to follow the curves in detail. Our best plan was to cut across as directly as possible, travelling in the open desert, and to strike the river at least once a day for water and pasturage.

We spent the hot hours pleasantly in our cool bower. There was a big pool of still water in the river above the ford, and in it crocodiles moved about under the hot sun. On the opposite bank the trees overhung the water, for the current had undermined them. But the strangest sight was an enormous tree that grew on a thickening of the volcanic tongue, right in the middle of the river. Here the black boulders had caught a little earth, which had given foothold to a sapling during a succession of mild rainy seasons, when the river had not swollen so high as to sweep it away. The fortunate treelet had sent down strong roots, and thenceforth it could dare the fury of the river at its wildest. Massive now, and widely spread over its ponderous bole, that tree had probably gained a hundred victories over the waxing flood. It surveyed the rapids undaunted, and the foaming waves lapped against the rocks whereon it perched with clutching roots, naked sinews as thick as the body of a man. The tree needed strong roots, for the flooded river must have risen in some recent year to an astonishing height. Caught in the lower branches were great bundles of dry vegetation, which had been skimmed off the top of the water in the height of the rainy season.

We were careful not to fall asleep while resting after the midday meal, for it is dangerous to slumber in that heat and the constant perspiration. At the first sign of dozing we would wake one another. While we were in this state one of our men came to tell us that Abulker, the old one-eyed servant, was ill and wanted to speak to us. On going to see him we found him more dead than alive. His thin body lay like a miserable bundle half coiled on a few empty sacks in the shadow of a tree. Near him were his scanty belongings, a satchel of untanned hide, his amulets, and the lance he had bought before leaving Addis Ababa. The fevers and the obstructed respiration of the last few days had made a living corpse of him. We had kept him and the other sick man alive with condensed milk diluted with water. Now Abulker re-

fused even this, as well as quinine or other medicine. He only wanted to see us again before dying. We had spent a little time near him and were going away, when he faintly called us back, that we should save him. His Italian of Eritrea was even less intelligible than usual, on account of his heavy breathing, and the feebleness of his voice that seemed to come from somewhere deep inside his fragile body.

He said: 'Abulker lives no longer, but you can fetch his breath back. . . . Do not give me medicines . . . but cut . . . master . . . you cut . . . and I will be saved . . . for Allah is Great.'

A sudden effort in that cadaverous body made me wonder where the energy could be stored. There are animals which when beheaded, still wriggle and move, and even walk, and then reel and stagger in all directions before finally dropping in death. Now there was a motion in that knot of bones and wrinkled skin, whence the lustre of life had fled, which made it turn on its side, and as it were stand, on a shaking elbow. The lifeless head drooped inert, that all the little strength that remained to that poor being might be concentrated in the quivering hand, that now struggled to reach to a small knapsack which lay on the ground near. The spent finger crept in, and drew forth a rusty razor, the handle half-broken and tied with a dirty piece of string. We understood what he wanted: he wanted us to make an incision in the back of his mouth. Suddenly the straining elbow gave way, and the wretched man fell backwards with a sliding motion. The outstretched hand lay palm upward, the razor abandoned.

We looked into the man's mouth, a swollen inflamed cavity, clotted with mucus and blood. Pastori knelt down and with a stroke or two bled the man, his mouth being held open by a piece of wood placed between the jaws. The agonising death rattle was choked with puffs and disgorgings of blood. On lifting the passive eyelid, I found the eye spent and vitreous. We turned the man face downwards, in order to free his throat. A thick red streak spread out slowly till it

reached the edge of the sacking, where it trickled on the burning sand.

Presently we left the dying man, having ordered one of the others to look after him. A large sack was spread over him, covering his head too, that he might die in peace, spared at least from the torture of the sun and flies. In a few hours he would be no more, and at dusk we must bury him. We reflected that poor Abulker had behaved well till the last. Even his short illness and quick agony had hardly handicapped us at all. Only during the last stages had he ridden mule or camel, tied to the saddle so that he should not fall.

Abdulla was ill too, and two sick men in a small caravan were a serious handicap.

We rested for the remainder of the day, and at sundown Abdul Kader, the interpreter, came and told us that Abulker was feeling better. We could scarcely believe the man: we had thought when we saw him approaching that he was coming to ask where the body was to be buried. He now told us that Abulker wished to travel with us on the morrow, tied on a camel, and that he felt he would be well again in a few days' time. We hastened to go and see Abulker, and found that he was certainly looking better. Pastori had assisted at the critical moment, and the crisis was now passed.

Abdulla, on hearing of Abulker's recovery, decided that he would get well too. He began to take milk and medicines, and ceased to wail about the unlikelihood of his seeing another sunrise. He now allowed himself to be unwound by his comrades from the countless rags and bandages in which he had bound himself as in grave-clothes.

Before sunset Pastori and I took a walk downstream, in order to see something of the country. We kept close to the bank of the river, and found that game was plentiful. We returned to our camp as night was falling. We had seen so many footprints of men and domestic animals that it surprised us that none of the natives came to see us. We must have been watched from every angle since our arrival, and

unless decided hostility was entertained towards us, somebody, we felt sure, must now appear. We had in fact barely reached our camp when a family party very hesitatingly approached. We allowed them to circle round the encampment, as though we were quite indifferent to their presence. They gradually came nearer and nearer, and at last we told the interpreter to ask them whether they wished to eat.

The party consisted of a man, his wife, and a little girl. The first was a tall supple fellow, beautifully made. The shiny coffee hue of his skin denoted the pure Danakil. He wore armlets halfway between elbow and shoulder, and a loin-cloth, and was armed with a lance and the invariable curved knife in its leather sheath. All metal objects are imported, for in Danakil nothing is wrought or manufactured; everything penetrates through countless plunderings from tribe to tribe, or, among friends, by bartering.

The woman was ugly, with pendulous breasts. She wore bone ear-rings and a necklace of tiny coloured stones. The little girl, some eight years of age, was pretty and graceful in her movements, gestures, and marvelling expression. She carried a goatskin, full of water, nearly as big as herself, supporting it on her hip previously to tying it on her back. It must have been very heavy for such a child, but she looked as though she were proud of doing something useful. Her face expressed the utmost curiosity and wonder, and it was a pleasure to watch her gestures of amazement, and to listen to her half-repressed cries of joy. We opened a box in which we carried the things to be used as presents, and gave something to each member of the family. It was our first distribution of propitiatory gifts. A few strings of glass beads, a tiny looking-glass, a coloured kerchief, were articles of value to them. Father, mother, and child, quite happy now, drove their modest flock of sheep and goats without fear to the river's brink. Presently they returned, bringing fresh milk, which was good for our sick men, and for Rosina too, who was very fond of it.

We were preparing for dinner when a little rain fell. We were not particularly pleased to see this. It showed us that we had started on our journey rather late. One cause of this had been the fact that we had had to remain much longer than we had expected at Awash on account of the Ramadhan fast.

We were sitting on our camp-beds, which were crowded under the tent for shelter from the rain: in front of the tent entrance our folding table had been set up, and was being laid in preparation for the evening meal. The hurricane lantern shed a weak circle of light. As we sat talking together, the sound of women's voices grew more and more audible in the distance. We sent Abdul Kader to tell them not to be afraid, but to come forward into the lamplight. By degrees four women approached uneasily, obviously not sure as to how far they could trust our assurances that we were friendly. They had all brought fresh milk, and this spontaneous token of goodwill was touching. We did not need so much milk, but we accepted it all so as not to disappoint them. In return we gave them beads and other presents, which delighted them. As soon as these peaceful and pleasant transactions had taken place, there came out of the darkness more sisters of theirs, and a circle of about a dozen formed around us. The lamplight was far from bright, but it was enough to show us that they were fine-looking and beautifully made women. At the most they wore a loin-cloth, large brass anklets, and, in some cases, a necklace. Their hair, carefully plaited in scores of rope-lets no thicker than a pencil, hung down about their necks. When, amidst hesitations and backings and gigglings, the ladies had all been supplied with presents, the men made their appearance. It is the system of the country to give the precedence to women in everything except warfare, not out of feelings of respect or homage for them, but that they may ascertain the intentions of the stranger. In travelling in a strange territory these gentle diplomats are sent forward as



DANAKIL FAMILY AT UNTE, RECEIVING PRESENTS. THE ILL-FATED BAYONNA
IS IN THE FOREGROUND (CENTRE)

close to us. The men threw stones and pieces of charred wood at him, but he merely changed his position, refusing to go away. I told them to leave him alone, and thereafter he sat and enjoyed the anticipation of the feast of refuse which would be his when we had gone.

The friendly Danakils were driving their sheep and goats to water when we forded the river in front of our encampment. We had been the cause of the animals losing their drink the night before, for the herdsmen had been afraid to approach while we were there. Some of our friends followed us, making signs of goodwill and offering to sell us milk. Others on the opposite shore awaited our crossing.

The ford was easily negotiated, and we landed on the western bank, being offered a dozen goatskins full of milk as we stepped aground. We could not unload our animals again now that we were on the march, however; so we were obliged to disappoint these people in their expectations of receiving gifts. Some of the girls to whom we had given presents the night before had forded the river with us, and were now engaged in displaying their acquisitions, and arousing the envy of their less fortunate sisters. They mocked the latter's childish disappointment, much to our embarrassment. We could scarcely refrain from smiling at their tricks and gestures, and at the various pushings which went on.

We were fortunate enough to find an easy way out of the forest belt, and thus reach the open territory beyond it. We soon came close to some hills, and I decided with Pastori to climb one of them which had particularly attracted us by reason of some curious mineral colouring which it displayed near the summit. The heat and labour of the ascent were considerable, but our toil was well rewarded, for we saw and picked up some beautiful specimens of volcanic minerals. We quickly descended into the plain again and caught up with the caravan, which was now close to the river once more. The trees here were of huge size, and the trunks were covered with creepers which made

them seem even larger. Vines hung like curtains of ropes from the lofty branches, and took root again where they touched the ground. The soil was free from grass and bushes, and the branches of the great trees formed a continuous roof overhead. The vertical banks of the river were discernible between the tree-trunks.

We found a subsided place in the bank, and went down to the water's edge. We were fortunate enough to discover that the stream was fordable in that place. Pastori and I had seen from the hill that the Awash swung far to the west, so we wanted to cross it as soon as possible. We passed over, and gradually, as we continued on our way, the tamarisks gave place to thick mimosas, and again the forest assumed that park-like form of large trees without undergrowth. There were many different kinds of trees, and the place was so serene and peaceful that we marvelled at the beauty of what seemed to be an enchanted spot. We halted for the noon rest, and men and beasts alike seemed delighted to have come to so fair a haven, after the long morning's march and the two river crossings.

We had unloaded under the verdant domes supported by far-flung branches, when a group of camels came in sight. It was tended by a few Danakils who, on seeing us, fled away. When some of the Unte men who had followed us called to them, however, they seemed to feel reassured, and came into camp and soon mingled with them.

It is a remarkable thing how swiftly news travels in these primitive countries. I felt practically certain that even now as we sat under the trees somebody was speeding ahead of us to inform the next clan of our coming. For at this moment men and women of the new district into which we had just come were pouring in upon us.

Among these, two men particularly attracted my attention. Both were tall, young, and soldier-like, and they were evidently great friends. Yet their appearance was highly divergent. One of them bore the traits of the normal Danakil,

while on the other's face were stamped the signs of the criminal. They both asked us to give them medicines, and after a while they freely answered our interpreter's questions, and became communicative. In order to distinguish one from the other, I styled them the Good One and the Bad One. The latter, boasting of his exploits, told us that he had already slain two men, while his companion was only entitled to adorn himself with the insignia of one victim. They were now concerting a plot against a man belonging to a neighbouring tribe, who possessed a rifle and a good-looking woman. When the division of the spoils took place, the Bad One was to have the woman, but was to renounce in favour of the Good One all his share of the honour of the exploit. The Good One was also to have the victim's rifle, but the testes of the unfortunate wretch were to belong to the Bad One, who was particularly anxious to increase his collection of these trophies. It is the custom among these bloodthirsty slayers to dry, and display in their huts or on their persons, those organs taken from the body of their victim.

These two conspirators were only awaiting a favourable phase of the moon before putting their plot into execution. Looking upon us as wise all-knowing soothsayers, they asked us to announce whether their plan was destined to succeed. We answered in riddles which only obscured the issue still further, and prostrated the already dull mental faculties of the two men. The attention of the Good One was distracted, and he moved away. Then his Bad friend immediately seized the opportunity to press his questions more explicitly upon us, desiring to be informed whether he would be likely to be more certainly successful if he went alone on his homicidal excursion. He was most anxious to know what the issue would be, for of late his fortunes had waned. He had killed his first two men without difficulty, but in every subsequent hunt he had come near to getting killed himself. He would now divest himself of his loin-cloth, and display the ugly scars

on his body, that we might know how near he had come to meeting his death. I asked him whether two victims were not sufficient to give him a fair share of honour among his people.

‘What is my life to be then for the rest of my days?’ said he. ‘Am I to stay idle?’

‘Tend your cattle,’ I said.

‘That is women’s work: men must think of blood,’ said he, ‘for it is better to die than to live without killing.’

This was true Danakil philosophy. In some of the tribes, a man cannot procure a wife unless he is able to present his bride with unmistakable evidence that he has killed a man, in the form of the trophies mentioned above. These trophies are dried and hung inside their hut, and whenever the valiant husband acquires new merit by committing further murders, new testimonials of the same gruesome nature will be added to the string.

Our savage friend had not realized that his replies to our questions had given us an insight into his mentality. We now commented upon his past deeds and future hopes, in such a way that he was fully confirmed in his suspicion that we were possessed of superhuman powers. He grew quite awestruck, and wriggled under our cunning words. We were careful not to harrow him beyond endurance, however, for though a savage always fears one possessed of magic powers, his very fear may plunge his weak mind into such a state of frenzy that he may become a source of danger to the magician.

We told him that he ought not to kill for pleasure, for such indulgence would eventually result in his being killed in his turn: the many wounds he had received of late were the visible signs of the wrathfulness of his fate. Nevertheless, we would give him a charm, written words, to protect him from the assaults of his neighbours. Pastori then took a scrap of paper, and with a pencil marked on it several flourishes and circles. He then folded the paper into a small compass, made a few passes over it with his hand, and finally delivered

it into the eager claws of the Bad One. That promising warrior pulled from his neck a small leather amulet-case into which he stuffed the paper which Pastori had vouchsafed to give him. When he had made this addition to his collection of evil-averting objects, the savage devoutly replaced the amulet string round his neck, his brows portentously drawn together. And now, feeling safer perhaps from the assaults of his enemies, he adverted with renewed gusto to the matter of his murderous plans. We found the subject growing somewhat stale, and sought means to get rid of our enthusiastic guest. But as he refused to leave until we had foretold the issue of his assault on the owner of the woman and the rifle, we gave him the following instructions, without saying directly what their result would be: 'Wait two big moons, then eat the charm we have given you and try your luck.'

But he was an explicit savage: equivocal instructions must be made clearer. 'Am I to go alone, or with my friend?' said he.

'If you take care not to attack anybody for these two moons you may try alone. And now go, for we are tired of your blood-talk.'

He went, and squatted under a tree, where he sat absorbed and alone, staring at our men and the crowd of visitors.

As we sat on sacks spread on the ground, leaning our backs against a fallen tree, masses of black clouds came up and darkened the sky. The heat became more sultry. Presently large drops of rain began to fall, and we took refuge under a cedar tree whose horizontal branches afforded effective shelter. But the rain soon ceased as a murmuring of wind ran through the forest. There was a thrashing of the tree-tops, and the last big drops fell drumming on the broad leaves of the ground vegetation. The earth almost immediately gave back this water in the form of steam. Light wisps of the vapour could be seen slowly rising, and moving along close to the soil, clinging to it. Though we stood motionless, we were dripping with sweat in that humid atmosphere. The perfumes and

aromas of the reeking forest came forth with the hot moisture, filling the air. The earth seemed to exhale warm pungent breath, as the sun touched it in patches, filtering here and there through the festooned canopy of green. The animal life which had paused motionless while the rain fell, now began to move again. Birds shook from their wings a shower of raindrops; animals shook spray from their coats; oily serpents slithered more smoothly over the wet ground.

We now made preparations to leave and resume our march. The camels were taken to the river for another drink, and there we watched the monkeys at play, pushing the big birds about as they tried to drink, till they were obliged to fly across to the other bank in order to put their beaks to the water.

At last we moved off. The Unte men, made rich by our presents, had left us, but we were still followed by the Bad One and a couple of his fellow-tribesmen. We passed clear of the forest belt, and came to open ground sprinkled with scattered bushes. Between these thickets noisy flocks of guinea-fowl strutted hither and thither, together with a few francolins, partridges and doves. No game preserve could have contained more birds than were here. The district is known as Adalia.

After a few hours we reached a village of nomads, who had temporarily settled in that place for the sake of the pasturage and water. The place where the huts had been pitched was called Ontutti Omar. It was less than a mile from the river. The people were of the Debene tribe. They came out to see this strange caravan of whose approach they had already been informed by runners, who had seen us at our noon encampment. They were all awaiting our arrival, and had brought goats, sheep and milk for sale. This was satisfactory, as it meant that we were penetrating into the country peacefully, and with a growing reputation for kindly dealing. Some of the villagers, incited by the Bad One, urged that we should go with them to shoot game, for the forest

was crowded with animals and birds. They, of course, were hoping to acquire the empty cartridge-cases, which are highly valued by them, and are kept in their cartridge-belts together with the live cartridges. A rifle is the most prized of all possessions in Danakil, and half a dozen cartridges are a sign of great wealth, in fact they *are* great wealth, and are constantly carried in the belt. A cartridge is never used by the fortunate owner of a rifle except to kill a man. Accordingly, his few cartridges are the potential means of a man's securing something which is of more value to him than anything else — the trophies which vouch for his having murdered somebody. Even an empty cartridge-case, owing to the line of thought to which it gives rise, has a value out of all proportion to its usefulness. Their rifles and ammunition are of the worst possible description. It is remarkable how little powder and lead and rusty rifle-barrel are necessary to send a man, either the manipulator or his quarry, to eternity.

The favourite pastime of a party of Abyssinians, as they sit chatting together, is to remove the lead bullet of their cartridges, those of them who possess any, and examine it closely, passing it on to the cronies for their inspection. Then he pours out the powder into the palm of his hand, pours it back again, and finally wedges the bullet in. Thus they continually play and tinker with the ammunition which has found its way into their possession. The cocking and pulling of the trigger of their ancient rifles is a never-failing source of entertainment to them.

Rosina, always watchful and patient, advised us to save our ammunition, for we already had more food than we needed, and begged us not to trust ourselves so freely in such villainous company. We told him we had no intention of using good cartridges, but only those which had missed fire on former occasions. The ammunition which one buys at Addis Ababa is highly unreliable. We had put aside a number of cartridges which we had found to be faulty, and these we now took with us. We were obliged to place a

tiny piece of flint in the hollow which the repeated hammering had made in the cap, and to hold the rifle very steady, so that it should not fall out at the critical moment. Half a dozen lively natives escorted us to the forest. We found the ground covered with grass, and dotted with bushes and thick groves and a few enormous trees. The scene was something like a private park in Europe, and game was so abundant that it seemed to have been driven there for our benefit. Buck and boar literally teemed, and could be seen in groups everywhere, quite unmoved at our advent, until we came within close range. The Danakils would not think of wasting a bullet on a wild animal, and they scarcely ever molest the game. The animals walked about in the most unconcerned fashion, while I tried to shoot them: the loud noise of the bolt, and the snap of the hammer, did not disturb them in the least. They had never heard such mechanical sounds before, and probably mistook them for grunts of ours. Very few of my cartridges would explode, but even after one had exploded there was no need to stalk fresh quarry, for after a few minutes another herd would come within range of its own accord. I sat under some low trees, and watched herds of game such as would surpass the happiest dreams of any hunter. Pastori had gone to another vantage-point with some of the tribesmen, and three of the latter remained with me. My friends were much interested in me and my equipment, and I should have liked to be able to converse with them. They studied every detail of my clothing, touched my hands and hair with great respect with the tips of their long thin fingers, and spoke in low tones, as it were of modesty and humility. The empty cases of the few cartridges which I had succeeded in firing compensated them amply for their assistance, for they were youths who owned no more than a lance and a knife. These are the universal weapons, carried by all; but as to rifles, probably the whole village could boast of possessing no more than two. To these poor men, an empty cartridge-case was a sweet foretaste of the delight of possessing fire-arms.

Now and then huge tortoises would come painfully labouring through the thick grass. They moved a little and then stopped, moved and stopped, as a heavy iron safe is shifted by inches with crow-bars. In the branches above birds fluttered continually, and everywhere the piercing squeak of the guinea-fowl could be heard.

Pastori shot several buck, so that our men and the inhabitants of the village had more meat than they could eat. We also took back with us part of a young boar. We three Europeans were the only ones to eat that unclean meat.

On the morrow we departed at dawn, happy in the knowledge that our two sick men were better, and that the natives were friendly. A few of our new friends came with us, in order to show us the best way to the river bank when we should come to the end of our march. Escorted by these willing path-finders, we met with very fair conditions. At first we came to a level expanse of firm ground, whereon our progress was excellent. This was followed by a zone of thick grass. Finally we came again to the forest belt, and managed to reach the river bank without trouble. Our Ontutti Omar boys were extremely clever at helping us to avoid obstacles. They ran about in the thorny wood, skipping and hopping like demons, so anxious were they that no camels should be checked by protruding branches or dense brushwood. They called and yelled, and got down with their heads close to the ground, in order to estimate the space available, and judge whether there was sufficient to allow our bulkily loaded camels to pass. Having ascertained this, they made signs to the caravan to advance, and proudly led it through the gap.

We halted in a delightful spot beside the river, where there were huge trees with branches spread, umbrella-like, sixty feet above the ground. The foliage of others had grown in the form of a sphere. Many of these trees were in blossom. There was sufficient space between the trunks to allow us to walk about without hindrance. It was a pleasure to lift

birds hopping and fluttering hither and thither, amongst the lofty branches. The place was called Sublale, and the tribe inhabiting the vicinity was the Aerelazo. There lacked neither water nor fuel, grass for the mules nor tender shoots for the camels, but all were plentiful and close at hand.

After having rested during the hottest hours of the day, we left that beautiful place in the afternoon. At dusk we arrived at a nomad village, whither our Ontutti Omar friends had led us. Again we found that somebody had brought news of us in advance, and our arrival was expected. The spot whereon the huts were built was called Additale, and the people belonged to the Eligle clan. Like all the other villages we had seen, this one consisted of a number of small semi-spherical huts, made with a few sticks bent archwise so as to form the ribs of a dome. The ends of the sticks were driven into the ground, and a few pieces of coarse matting which had been thrown over the top were held in place by sods. In accordance with the universal custom, this village was situated on open ground, allowing unobstructed visibility for a considerable distance in every direction. There are no villages within the forest belt, or anywhere else where there are trees, for such places lend themselves to the carrying-out of ambushades. Every tribe possesses its own territory, which has belonged to it from time immemorial, but any of these territories are constantly liable to be encroached upon by a neighbouring tribe which grows too powerful to be withstood. Boundaries are in a continual state of change, according to the waxing or waning of tribal power.

The cattle graze in the forest, being tended by women and boys, while some of the men hide themselves at points of vantage, and keep watch. The bulk of the population remains in the village, however, where a few of the men are always more or less methodically keeping a look-out for the approach of enemies. Nobody does any real work: they seldom even cook anything. They live on milk and meat, and



IN THE FOREST AT SUBLALE

have accordingly developed a thin feline physique, together with catlike movements and intelligence. Agriculture is entirely unknown among them. They produce fire by rubbing together two pieces of wood. The women collect their firewood, and fill their goatskin bags with water, carrying the heavy load on the back, supported by a rope passing across the naked breasts, probably with a view to giving spring to the load. The men do nothing, but lie about in bestial indolence, storing up their energies for their next fight. They do not even practice martial exercises, but in their fights rely on crafty and treacherous surprise attacks, instead of the display of valour perfected by training.

We spent the night at Additale, but sleep was not easy to us. We had encamped close to the village, where the soil was much beaten by feet and hooves. The slightest movement or gust of wind raised clouds of dust. Our mules and camels were delighted with this couch, and rolled and kicked in the air, and rubbed their backs all night long, filling the air with choking dust.

Abyssinians are difficult people to spend one's nights with. They will continue to talk in a drone throughout the night, and will wake one another to tell some pointless tale. Then at dawn, when they ought to be doing their work, they will fall soundly asleep, and will go on snoring under the noonday sun. The glare and the flies trouble them little; only a touch of your booted toe will recall them to their duties. On the present occasion, however, it was not entirely gossip which kept them wakeful throughout the night. Their wakefulness was partly due to fear. Treachery is to be expected in Danakil, and though a white man commands a certain respect, by reason of his superior fortitude and will power, our native servants were not endowed with qualities calculated to keep the scalp-hunters at a respectful distance. Our men presented unusual opportunities to the savages to reap honour and trophies, and it was doubtless only the presence of Europeans which kept in check their native ferocity. Had these Plateau

men been found alone where they now were, the Danakils would have made short work of them. Even if some of their lives had been spared, as was unlikely, they would certainly have been mutilated, and then sold as eunuch slaves to some chief.

Mosquitoes contributed to our discomfort that night, and the result of my restlessness was that I roused everybody while it was still dark, and before the first glimmer of dawn had paled the sky we were already on the march. After crossing several large areas of grazing land, on which herds of water-buck and gazelle were feeding, we reached the river again at about noon. Here we came to a village called Kortumi, in the territory of the Assoba tribe.

THE GALALU PLAIN

As we approached the group of huts which made up Kortumi, several men and their chief marched out to meet us. We wished to continue on our way a little, so as to encamp near the river, in a place suitable for ourselves and for the animals. But the chief and the elders insisted on showing us what they considered to be a more satisfactory spot. We found we could only yield and proceed whither they recommended, led by the mob of villagers.

As I had expected, the place to which they took us was quite unsuitable, being at some distance from the water and pasture. But by now we had been travelling for an additional half-hour, and our camels were exhausted by the excessive heat. We were therefore obliged to stop and unload under some mimosas. A snake, six feet long, came out and went on lazily creeping over bales and boxes. Our men with sticks and lances began to chase it, and the Danakils made scores of lance-throws at it, but all missed their mark. The track of the snake along the ground was marked by lances the points of which were embedded in the earth. Pastori took a rifle and killed the reptile with lead. The excitement of the Danakils over this pursuit seemed to imply that snakes were not common there.

The bustle and confusion around us was increasing every minute, for the entire population of the village was crowding

to stare at us. The press was very unpleasant, as it deprived us of our freedom, besides filling the air with the noisome stench of the natives. As the afternoon advanced they remained as troublesome as at first, getting in our way continually, and pestering us to buy milk, goats, sheep, and young freshly caught bucks, or to take them in exchange for tobacco, beads and lengths of cotton stuff. We purchased far more than we needed, but were unable to satisfy everybody. Disgusted by the manners of the people, and by our unsuitable camping-place, we planned to resume our march that evening, and made a resolution never to yield in future to the pressure of village chiefs. Our projects were to meet with immediate obstacles, however.

Soon after our arrival there had come to pay us a visit an Abyssinian, accompanied by a group of his own men. The presence of such a person seemed strange in this wild place. He was a *dania*, an itinerant judge. He was called Ato Sale, and he and his posse of police were armed to the teeth. Though his expression betrayed an arrogant and overbearing nature, as befitted a member of that official class which claims the privilege of harassing the rest of the community, he forced himself to display a meek bearing in his present unsafe surroundings. The hatred and inclination to villainy that he harboured in his bosom, however, flashed through the veneer of enforced mildness with every glance of his eye.

Ato Sale drank coffee and spirits with us, spoke at length with us and our men, asked for and received presents. His presence was far from reassuring to us. We should have much preferred to have to do only with the criminal Afars, who are easily tamed by a little tact and a few trinkets. That judge on the contrary could hardly have avoided causing us trouble and vexation, making us pay non-existent tolls, by reason of the fact that he was an official of that avaricious Abyssinian 'justice' which pronounces perjury to be no crime. Victimization, bribe-catching, and bombastic self-assertion were bred in the man. That gatherer of material

for the prisons of Menelik's Lion was the worst thing we might have met in our path. It would indeed have been hard to escape him without being plagued. I pondered as to what circumstance he would make the plea for his extortion and obstruction.

Ato Sale left us in apparent goodwill, and we were foolish enough to hope that our feelings about him were without foundation. Our doubts were short-lived, however, for in the afternoon he returned, and we saw that new developments were to be revealed. We offered him coffee, and he seated himself, holding, as ever, his rifle between his legs. He had dressed for the occasion in an old military tunic, hailing from somewhere in Europe, and Abyssinian breeches of white cotton, very broad in the seat and tight at the calf. He even wore sandals. While he drank his coffee his hand never left his rifle, but his fingers nervously played about the trigger and the bolt. His men, Abyssinians of the border, stood about armed, and fraternized with our servants. The Danakils of the village kept in the background, watching.

Ato Sale now began to raise objections to everything we proposed to do, to the itinerary we wanted to follow, to our lack of 'papers of Government,' and to the fact that we had with us men from the Plateau. Nothing would satisfy him; he was as stubborn as a mule. He demanded that we retrace our steps for our two last stages, ford the river, and keep to the other side, travelling at the foot of the Plateau spurs.

Realizing that we had again come in contact with Abyssinia proper, and that we now had to contend again with the cavilling of that miserable country, we concluded that we could not do better than delay matters somewhat. The night brings counsel, and meanwhile we would send presents to this ruffian.

We made our preparations to sleep without pitching our tent, for it was a beautiful night. The moon rose through the trees, turning the forest into an enchanted scene full of black shadows and white light, unexpected and wonderful.

Morning rose with its cares, and the villagers flocked to us for medicines, a quinine pill for this man, a throat tablet for that; something for a suffering woman, or a wounded child. We filled several vessels with a weak solution of potassium permanganate, and that bright pink fluid was much sought after by our patients. They dipped rags in the miraculous water, and bathed their sores and their aching limbs. Our dispensary was in the shadow of a mimosa, and proud was the man whom we appointed as chief assistant.

Some time later I went with two men to take a bath at the river bank. I found the Awash sunk some fifty feet beneath the rim of the earth banks. I made my way down a steep path to the water, and bathed by filling a bucket in the stream, and pouring the water over myself. Several women came down to fill their goatskins, and presently they began to bathe and sport in the water. On seeing us, they fled, naked as they were, and hid themselves in the scrub that grew under the vertical cliff. But soon, gathering courage, they approached us, and on finding that we did not molest them, they began to show themselves off as mother nature had made them, bending their lissom bodies and playing about on the sand. It was pleasant to watch them pursuing one another into the stream, and throwing one another's goatskins in our direction, so as to force the owner to come near to us in order to retrieve it. They romped and giggled, and pushed each other like kittens. The two boys who were with me were afraid to look at them. They could not forget, even in the face of these feminine charms, that they were in the land of Danakil. At last the girls took up their goatskins, wrapped a length of cotton material round their hips, and climbed lazily up the steep path.

After the midday meal, the dania made his appearance again, accompanied by his men. He refused to sanction our advance. We managed to treat him tactfully and pleasantly but found we were wasting time to no purpose. We finally told him that we intended to leave for the north, whether he

approved or not, as we had planned our journey straight through the middle of Danakil to the Aussa. However, he would not yield, so we cut the discussion short, and ordered our men to load the camels. The dania was in a passion, but we paid no further attention to him. The Danakil chief and his people seemed to be enjoying the scene.

When the dania saw that we were ready to depart, he begged us to write out and sign a document stating that we were travelling at our own risk, and that we absolved him of all responsibility for our safety. We were far from acknowledging that he had authority to demand any such document, but to cut the matter short we wrote a few lines in French, and handed them to him. At last we were on the move.

The camels had only paced a few yards from the place of our encampment when that Ethiopian jailor came after us to deliver his treacherous last shot. Walking fast, he managed to get ahead of the caravan. Then he turned about, raised his hand in the air, and put the Amharas and Gallas in our gang on their allegiance in the name of the Word of Menelik.

Our Plateau men stood as if thunderstruck. The command which the dania had delivered was as potent now as it had been when delivered by the dead Negus Menelik himself. We tried to restrain our men, but seeing Wolde Gabriel leave us and pass over to the dania, the others, after the briefest hesitation, followed him. They all surrendered to us their rifles, cartridges, and the pouches which contained articles of which we were in constant need while on the march, and which they always carried. We made the camels which carried the personal gear of our deserters kneel down, and their belongings were restored to them. Nevertheless, we three Europeans exchanged glances of inquiry, and after a short consultation we decided that it would be foolish to lose our band of men now, as our expedition could not go on without them. We therefore approached the dania, and told him that we were prepared to follow the more westerly route

along the base of the Plateau, as he had advised. We would take with us one of the guides which the Danakil chief had already offered us. The dania seemed quite satisfied with this arrangement, so without wasting a minute more we re-formed our column, and returned the fire-arms to our men.

We now turned about in order to retrace our steps, much to the joy of our Plateau men. If one could get to the Aussa by travelling in safe country along the foot of the Plateau until coming abreast of Batie and Dessie, and then turn north-east and follow the caravan route, why not do so? Ato Sale must have seemed to them a very wise counsellor.

We proceeded, or rather retreated, for an hour and a half, and then called a halt, saying that we were feeling tired. We gave the order to unload as the sun set beyond the forest. Three Danakils were still following us, so altogether we were at full strength.

By nightfall it had begun to rain, and it continued to rain for hours, with the result that we were soaked with water. We had not had the tent pitched, because we wanted to be ready to make a quick departure on the following morning. Mosquitoes added to the discomfort, and long before dawn we were glad to get up though we had to load under the downpour which still persisted. At the first sign of daylight we moved off.

We called the three Danakils to us, and instructed them to walk ahead of us to Sublale. We gave them some money and urged them to hurry forward and prepare a camping-place for us. Those fleet walkers rapidly outdistanced us, and disappeared amongst the mimosas. No sooner had we lost sight of them than Pastori and I took the lead of the caravan, and gradually turned it towards the east. For some time nobody noticed that we were no longer travelling southwards, but presently the Plateau men became puzzled, for the sun had risen and was shining full in their faces, instead of on their left hand. Paying no attention to their meekly offered observations concerning the direction of Sub-

lale, we continued due east. We had already placed some miles between ourselves and Ato Sale's headquarters, and the risk of his interference was growing smaller with every step we took.

We presently reached the base of a low but steep hill-chain which stretched north and south. We here bore more to the southward, making for a point where we could see there was a gap in the barrier. If we could pass to the further side of this barrier we could then turn northward and travel behind it, completely cut off from Ato Sale. Keeping southward along the base of the hill, we eventually came to some hot springs at a place called Peti Bilen, called by us Little Bilen. We halted at this place, and decided that we would resume our march in the evening, and try to interpose the long hill between ourselves and Ato Sale before nightfall.

Our plans, however, were not destined to work without a hitch, for in a short time a Danakil chief with some of his men made their appearance. They had come to salute us, and to ask for presents. These people were far from being welcome to us, for we did not want anybody in the neighbourhood to know which way we were travelling, in case the news should reach Kortumi. The chief was headman of a village to the eastward, and belonged to the Eligle tribe, some of the members of which we had already met at Ad-ditale. We gave the party coffee and sugar, hoping they would take their departure, but our liberality only increased their desire to remain close to us.

After taking a bath amidst the boulders at the hot springs, we went forth with our rifles, telling our visitors that we intended to remain where we were until the next morning. We had ordered our tent to be rigged, and this set the chief's mind at ease, and convinced him that we had no intention of leaving before he had had an opportunity of bringing more of his people to see us. His village was at some distance, and it was his intention to go there and return to us on the morrow.

We found some huge tortoises amongst the scrub, and from the shell of a dead one I detached fifty-two pieces, which I remembered being as many as there are weeks in a year. The largest of these fragments, those on the top of the back, were as large as my two hands placed side by side. Many orixes and ariels, and other sorts of gazelles and antelopes, browsed and flitted amongst the scrub. After a while rain began to fall, and we returned to our camp, glad that we had given orders for pitching our tent. Rain was still pouring down at midnight, the hour we had secretly appointed for our departure, and we were unable to carry out our plan. It alarmed us to find the rainy season already upon us.

At three o'clock in the morning we began to load our beasts in the rain, so as to begin our march before daybreak. Each one of us wore an empty sack over his head and shoulders, folded in the form of a monk's cowl. The jute soon became water-logged, however, and our hoods were as heavy as lead.

At five o'clock we were ready to leave. We divided the caravan in three sections, as the ground had become very slippery. It was very dangerous for the soft-footed camels, and we soon had them falling frequently. With slow short steps they laboriously made their way, and we frequently had to run to hold up an animal which was floundering about and on the point of falling. In the midst of this confusion and darkness one of the camels strayed away unobserved. As soon as we discovered its loss, we detached some of the men to search for it. While the caravan went on its way, we began to systematically beat the ground near where the beast was supposed to have left the others. We had considerable difficulty in keeping contact with one another, as we sank and splashed in the mire and pools, for we dared not call in a loud voice for fear of our departure being discovered. Daylight was still obscured by the heavy clouds when we at last found the animal fixed immovably amongst some trees, a rope of its load having caught in a branch.

We hastened to rejoin the caravan, passing over our abandoned camping-place, which we found already infested with hungry jackals.

Our rate of progress was little more than half a mile to the hour, but the secrecy of our movements was favoured by the darkness. As the wan light of the cloudy dawn crept into the sky, we discovered ourselves faced by a large sheet of water. We found it quite impossible to wade this, and the increasing delay of our escape from the Kortumi district made us now decide to scale the long hill without further searching for an easy pass. The rocky nature of the steep slope, though dangerous to camels, was not more treacherous than the slippery clay in which they had been floundering since we started.

At nine o'clock we had reached the crest of the first rise of the Bareita range. The rain had stopped, but we were wet through and chilled. However, we knew that the heat of the day was not far distant, and that when it came we should be longing for the cold again. Tired and wet as we were, we were filled with delight and wonder as we watched the magnificent landscape slowly emerge from the mists. To the south, Mount Kachinoa was visible in solitary beauty. A little to the westward of this rose the Tadacha Malka chain, forming the background to the Wara Malka volcanic hills. In the gap between these two mountains, the Awash ran in the region of Awash station. To the north-east of Kachinoa gleamed Mount Assabot, a lofty peak on the summit of which stands a Coptic convent. At every point of the compass chains of hills arose, and behind them mountains emerged more and more clearly. Nearer lay wide plains, which gradually rose to mingle with the azure of the hills which, in its turn, changed to a light opalescence on the far distant mountains. The contrasts of light and shade were extraordinary, for the sun sent compact beams of light through breaks in the heavy clouds, and these moved swiftly across the landscape, throwing a stream of dazzling light

now here, now there. Thus valleys and gorges, hitherto invisible, were revealed for a sudden moment. I was spell-bound at the wonderful spectacle.

We came to a narrow valley which took us in a north-easterly direction. There were many ottardas here, as large as turkeys, and we shot one of them. Presently the valley grew wider, and we came to a water hole called Dinikale Maru, which lay, a tranquil mirror, in a small volcanic crater. In front of us lay an immense plain called Galalu. In the far distance to the north-eastward, I could see the isolated volcanic mountain of Ayelu, towering over the landscape. Nearer, and to the west of Ayelu, rose two conical mountains of a strange similarity, the Kurbilis, at the foot of which occurred the massacre of the Greeks and their men who were hunting zebras.

We felt glad to be out of the district where Abyssinians of the Plateau might be met with. We now exchanged our Kortumi guide, who had served us well, for a Danakil belonging to a local tribe whom we met at the pool of Dinikale Maru. This man was to guide us across the Galalu plain. He appeared to be a willing helper, giving us the names of the physical features of the country, and speaking with intelligence of the direction of our next march.

In the afternoon Pastori and I went for a walk about the country to the west. We climbed up a series of natural steps, and presently came to the western rim of a sort of terrace. The cliff on which we stood overhung the Awash valley, which lay a thousand feet below us. Some parts of the great plain were swampy; others were pure desert, and in the distance the river vegetation showed as a thin line of sombre blue. Beyond the Awash lay the lands of the Aizamale tribe, a dangerous and bloodthirsty clan. The boundless arid plains, and the wild mountains, struck me with a feeling of awe. To pass those huge distances in such a grim country seemed an undertaking impossible of accomplishment. We did not even know a fraction of the difficulties which were

to be encountered, for no other traveller had ever reached some of the places which we proposed to visit.

I made corrections in the maps which I had with me, and made some sketches, and then we made haste to return to Rosina before the sun should set.

Abdul Kader now told us that our Danakil guide wanted to leave, and would be glad to have a present. This man had done nothing except answer our questions about the country. He had voluntarily offered his services as our guide for the morrow. However, we gave him a present, and let him go. We knew enough about the district we were in to find our way for one day's march without a guide. The night was cold, and we were obliged to close the tent flaps in order to keep warm.

On the morrow we were ready to advance at daybreak. Our guide of the previous day now appeared with another man who, he said, would go with us and show us the water-holes at the end of our next march. We reduced his proposed wages from five thalers to one, and accepted his services. He accepted our terms as casually as though we had agreed to give him the amount originally asked for. These people hardly understand the meaning of money values. A thaler is often carried as a sort of curiosity. Pastori, who made the arrangement, paid our new guide his fee in advance.

We set off, and had not been travelling half an hour when our guide, without saying a word to anybody, turned away in a totally different direction to that which we were pursuing. We called him back, but he did not take the trouble to so much as turn his head. Our thaler had made that man rich, and we were now left without a guide. We were gaining experience of the faithlessness of the Danakils, and we now made a resolution that in future we would never pay wages until the service had been rendered.

Our guide's defection did not worry us, as we could probably find our way unaided across the Galalu plain. But, unfortunately, at the moment of his departure a thick fog

was closing around us. Everything was enveloped and made invisible, except at the shortest range. We marched for hours without seeing a sign of the landscape. Yet we kept on moving, and hoping that the obscuring vapour would lift, so that we might adjust our course with the aid of some landmark. Our compasses were stowed away in the baggage, and we did not want to go to the trouble of unloading if we could manage without doing so.

After five hours of this blindfold travelling, we were overjoyed to catch a glimpse of the top of the hill of Sarakama, and we knew that in spite of the roughness of the ground we had all along been moving, by the most extraordinary and the happiest of coincidences, exactly in the right direction. The atmosphere grew more and more clear, until at last the whole landscape was revealed to us again.

The heat soon became almost unbearable in the humid atmosphere. We were in a grassy district, and the ground was marked everywhere with the tracks of game. Out on the plain, wherever one looked, there were herds of antelopes and flocks of birds. Tracks of ostriches and zebras were common. The need of water was becoming urgent. We decided to spread ourselves over a wider front, so as to have better opportunities for discovering a pool or spring. Pastori kept at some distance to the right, and I kept to the left, of the caravan. I found traces of puddles, but they were dry. We continued in this way for another hour, when we came to a slight depression in which a little muddy water was left. The water was not in one pool, but the earth had been impressed with a hundred little hollows by the hooves of cattle, and each of these small cups contained some muddy water. There were not more than ten gallons of the fluid all together. We threw ourselves flat on the ground, and drank. The unfortunate camels could not drink from such small holes, but they rushed to the place, and within a few minutes there was nothing to be seen but slimy mud where the water had been.

We were obliged to halt and unload here, as the animals and men were very fatigued. A few mats were flung over some thorn bushes, and we were already resting in their shade, when to our delight and surprise we heard cows lowing in the distance. After a while three Danakils appeared. They told us they belonged to a clan which was migrating to better pastures, for the vegetation had withered up in their customary haunts. A little later, some thirty cows and a number of women and children came in sight. They all appeared to be suffering from thirst. They pointed out to us some more water places, similar to that which we had found for ourselves, and we had all our receptacles filled with the thick putrifying fluid.

TO MAGU

THE nomads offered us milk, which was much appreciated by my friends, though, personally, I find it impossible to drink. The pretty black milkmaids came chasing their cows and calves right into our encampment, as an excuse to come to close quarters and show themselves. Others remained at a short distance, watching and smiling at us, till their men-folk called them away.

We had rested for some hours when the sky to the north became filled with dust. It was a sandstorm, borne by the khamsin wind. Although it was far away from us, and would probably not reach the district in which we were, yet the sky was dull and grey.

In the afternoon Pastori and I took a walk, as was our habit when in camp. We came to a series of gullies, joining in a gorge three hundred feet deep. In the bottom we found a pool of clear water two feet deep. We immediately gave instructions that all the dirty water which we had scooped up was to be thrown away, and the vessels refilled at this pool. The animals were led down to drink also.

It was now getting dark, and the nomads had gathered round our tent, waiting for the distribution of presents. The girls now posed as familiar friends. We gave something to everybody, and all seemed to be satisfied. In this place our lamp attracted myriads of insects, mostly hard little beetles.

On the morrow, one of the nomads offered to act as our guide, and after the inevitable long-drawn argument, during which he changed his mind a score of times, he finally took his place amongst our men.

The ground soon became littered with basalt and lava rocks. We were forced to travel amongst these, for the smoother ground was cut up by ravines which it was impossible to negotiate.

We were presently met by two men and a boy who declared themselves to be members of the Gibdozo, whose territory extends across the Awash, and is bordered to the south by that of the Aizamale. The boy was the son of the local chief, and had come in his father's stead to offer his services. We appreciated this act of courtesy, and without delay we paid the nomad guide his due and dismissed him. The lad, who was some sixteen years of age, regarded me with great curiosity, and never left my side. I was riding our only available mule, in order to spare my boots on the sharp honeycomb lava, and that may have been the reason why the boy paid undivided attention to me. He riveted his stare on me for minutes at a time, and was in danger of tumbling over the rocks which lay on the rough ground. When he stumbled on a stone he would barely cast a glance at his path, but reeling under his efforts to recover his balance, he would still steal another sidelong look at me. Or he would concentrate his gaze on some part of my mule, or on my boots, in such a manner that, had I not already proved that the lad was unusually intelligent, I should have supposed his brain was defective.

Towards noon we came to the bed of a torrent called Kubedadda, in which we had already seen from a distance the glittering of water pools. We halted to rest near the water. On the low bank some trees were growing, and we had a recess cleared amongst them, which, with the aid of several pieces of matting, sheltered us from the rays of the sun.

On resuming our march, we climbed the bank of the

Kubedadda, and found ourselves once more on level ground. The landmark, which we had supposed to be a hill, now revealed itself as a wall of considerable length. Hitherto we had seen only its head, but now its long flank was visible. We marched across a smooth plain of whitish clay, which was dotted with round thickets of a peculiar disc-leaved plant of which camels are inordinately greedy. The natives as they pass by these shrubs, break off a small stick and chew it for hours. When they have reduced the fibrous end to a sort of brush, they clean their teeth with it.

The plain stretched farther than the eye could see, as did the rocky rampart on our right. The latter was some five hundred feet high. Many beautiful antelopes and zebras gave animation to the scene. We pursued some of the zebras, but relinquished the chase when the animals began to climb the slope. The crevices and boulders of the long hill assumed a grim pattern as the sun sank lower and threw strange shadows amongst them.

Night fell, and the only things remaining visible in the faint light were that part of the white plain on which we moved, and the black rampart to our right. At one point the three Danakils signed to us to stop, and we found that we had come to a good water-hole. In the midst of our unloading, we heard a great splashing of water in the pool. We went to see what it was, and found the chief's son taking a bath. He was quite unconcerned by the fact that we had no other supply of drinking water, and that he was kicking up mud from the bottom though we had not yet secured a single bucketful of the fluid. He came out of the well when we told him to do so, but it was quite evident that he thought our order an odd one. The Danakils do not object to drinking water in which they have bathed; they first perform their ablutions, and then peacefully drink. They are nominally Muslims, but they know very little about the tenets of their religion. The fact that there is very little intercourse between the different tribes, all living in constant fear of one

another's treachery, is also a cause of the evolution of differing religious customs in this most savage of Islam's provinces.

Soon after the youth had bathed in the pool, and we had had our drinking water drawn from it, a herd of cattle came and walked about in it. After that the boy's crime appeared less heinous in my eyes. We had grown unfastidious about water, being only too pleased if we could find a few bucket-fuls of some sort of fluid whenever we had need of it. On arriving at a water-hole, we always took care to draw the drinking water before the animals had begun to stir up the mud, but the water, even though it might be free from mud, was always far from being pure, for cattle, wild animals, and nomads had all drunk, and very often washed their bodies, many times at the pool before we saw it. We carried no filters, for they would have been too great an encumbrance; and even if we had carried such gear we should seldom have had time to make effective use of it. Let anybody who has ever suffered real thirst in a tropical country imagine himself watching, in that state, single drops of water dripping from a filter.

The herdsmen who had brought their cattle to the pool told us that their chief, our youth's father, would soon be with us, for a messenger had been sent to tell him the news of our arrival. The great man had gone to a distance in pursuance of some tribal matter, but as soon as he heard of us he would immediately drop official business and hasten to meet the Farangi (Europeans).

We had scarcely finished our meal when the old gentleman arrived. He was extremely thin and dried up, but of a very happy disposition. His alarming parchedness of body, whereby every rib and bone was distinctly visible, did not seem to diminish in the least his activity and alertness of mind. He kissed my hands several times with much devotion, making the usual inquiries as to our condition, and as to whether our journey was prospering. While we put questions to him as to the state of the road, the water-holes, and so on,

the old man kept repeating 'mane . . . mane . . . mane' at short intervals. It is the custom in these parts to show approval by saying mane (good) of all that is said when one wants to show deference to the speaker.

Coffee had been prepared, and it was now offered to the chief and his men. Some of them had never tasted it before in their lives, though they had heard of it from others. The chief next asked for brandy, so we poured him out some in a cup. He had evidently tasted it on a former occasion, and he now wanted to explain to his son and the men what its effect was. He called to them to approach near to him, and they all squatted on the ground in a ring. After some explanatory words, which I was very sorry not to be able to understand, the old man took a copious draught of the spirit. It evidently burned his throat, for he made such a wry face, and blew out his breath so strenuously, that we could scarcely control our rising laughter. His men seemed surprised and full of admiration for the power of the drink. The paucity of our supplies would allow us to satisfy the curiosity of all our visitors by giving only a sip to each; yet that was sufficient to give the simple fellows an experience which they will probably never cease to remember and describe to their friends.

In reply to our request for a guide, the chief told us to dismiss the men who had helped us since the morning, and said that he would find us a reliable man. He sent his son to attend to the business which he himself had abandoned on hearing of our arrival. Then, in a flood of happy noises, he too left us and vanished in the night, his object being to summon the man who was to be our guide.

We gave quinine to some of our men who were suffering with fever, and then settled ourselves to sleep. We slept badly, however, for on three occasions during the night I was obliged to get up and readjust the tent-ropes, for the powerful blasts of wind lifted the pegs out of the loose ground into which they had been driven. At about two o'clock in the morning I

felt that at last I was about to fall into a sound sleep, when a chorus of uproarious yells awoke me once more. Our merry chief had returned, and was anxious that we should be fully aware of the fact.

Sleeping was out of the question now, and although our men would have willingly continued to lie on the ground wrapped in their blankets for ever, we decided that the best thing we could do was to get on the move without delay. While Settie was loading the camels, we had more coffee made for the chief, and finally gave the noisy old fellow a few thalers in return for his assistance in supplying us with a guide.

Like the chief, our new guide was a very old man, and his skin was so wrinkled that it seemed a remarkable thing that such a body could have strength to walk. There was no single hair on his head, and the skin over the skull was strained tight to the bone, as was that over the cheek-bones and jaw. He looked like a resurrected mummy. However, his extreme age seemed to promise level-headedness, and a store of useful experience.

We started before dawn, and a slight rain somewhat retarded our march for the first half-hour, making the ground exceedingly slippery. We still proceeded parallel to the long hill-chain, which seemed interminable. Soon the ground became marshy, and we were obliged to deviate to the right, where it rose a little. Here the soil was covered with big blisters of sodium and magnesium chloride, that crackled under our feet. The long volcanic hill continued of uniform height, and without any sign of vegetation. On the previous day we had advanced at a distance of about a mile from its base, but now, by reason of the marsh, we had to keep to its very foot, where the rocks met the level surface of the plain. We came to a very wide pool, fed by many hot springs which issued from the crevices in the rocks. The water was black and fetid, whether by reason of the chemical action which released horrid bubbles of vapour from it, or of the putrify-

ing vegetation round the rim. Tall reeds grew thickly along the margin. There were many signs of hippopotami.

We had left the marsh and pool behind us, and passed round several spurs of the hill, when suddenly we came in sight of the Awash. I immediately left the caravan, and went towards the river. The trees were stunted and sparse. I saw a large river eagle sitting on a bare tree on the opposite bank. It showed clear against the sky; one half of its body was white and the other half was coal black. Aigrettes and other birds were numerous. But our joy at seeing the Awash again, after the monotony of our long march over dreary plains and swamps, was dashed by the news that our red mule was giving signs of being about to die. The poor animal could scarcely walk, his eye was glazed and almost lifeless. We stayed beside him for a little time, and then decided that we must abandon him. Rosina was very cast down, for the mule was his own, and they had travelled a great deal together on the Plateau in bygone years.

We continued marching close to the river, but cutting straight across the bends so as to avoid unnecessary delay. The ground was almost free from trees, and began to show some signs of grass. This gradually thickened, and presently we found ourselves in the middle of what was practically an expansive meadow. Our eyes were delighted by the sea of green, and the poor mules, which had not eaten anything for thirty hours, were wildly excited. We lingered for a while to allow them to graze.

We concluded that Rosina's red mule had been poisoned by drinking the foul water of the last pool we had passed. The muddy water of wells was less risky than that which issued hot from volcanic rocks, if the effects of the latter were unknown. We had noticed that our guide shrank from drinking that warm foul-smelling water, and we had followed his example, being imitated in turn by our men. The famished mule had drunk unregarded.

Soon we saw cattle, and even horses, on the grassy hori-

zons. We first noticed them at a great distance, for the plain was perfectly flat and very wide — limited eastward by the long hill, which formed a rampart below Mount Ayelu. We had kept this hill on our right hand for some thirty-five miles. The banks of the Awash, on our left, were entirely denuded of trees, for the Danakils had cut them all down for fuel. Beyond the river, the grassy plain continued without a single break to the horizon. There were groups of huts, enclosed within hedges of dry thorn branches, on the nearer bank. This was Magu, in the territory of the Madima tribe. Both men and women came forth to look at us, and the former followed after us. They wore a sulky villainous look, and were evidently anything but soothing to our Amharas and Gallas. Among the Danakils, trophies secured from victims belonging to their traditional enemies of the Amhara and Galla races are far more highly prized than those secured from Danakils of a neighbouring tribe.

Many of these Madima men had bracelets, worn between the elbow and shoulder. These ornaments indicated that the wearer had slain a man or men, each bracelet representing one victim. Every grown man also had a hole pierced in the lobe of each ear, a sign that a year had elapsed since he had killed his first victim. The younger ones wore instead a feather stuck in their long woolly hair, to show that though they had not yet been murderers for a whole year, they had nevertheless already been successfully engaged in the honourable pastime. The feather is worn during the twelve months immediately following the first kill. All these men looked savage and bloodthirsty. They were numerous, and showed unmistakable signs of hostility, so it will not be wondered at that their presence was not very comforting to us. They would slouch from the edge of the river, and come and stand close to our line of march, so as to silently watch us defile past them. They asked and gave no news, and in fact spoke no word at all. Our old and venerable guide had been given us by the merry chief probably because only one so experienced and

tactful would be likely to pass amongst the Madima without arousing their fatal instincts. A young man, seeing them glare in silent hostility, might have done or said something to provoke them. They looked grim and truculent enough as they stood resting on their lances, whereof the butt touched the ground, while one leg was twisted around the shaft in the unique Danakil manner. No sign of greeting or courtesy came from any of them. We had never experienced such taciturnity before, except in a few Danakils who had fled at our approach through fear. As soon as the first fears of danger had been allayed, the newly met strangers would always approach our guide with outstretched hand. So the two sides would grasp hands, and indulge in a series of slow rubbings, and repeat in a low drone, 'mane . . . mane . . . mane' for some minutes. Then they would begin to exchange bits of news, their mutual handrubbing would cease, and they would launch forth into a regular conversation. At the end, they always departed without any form of farewell.

Amongst these Magu men nothing of this sort happened. Our guide, bent a little under the weight of his years, plodded along without casting a glance at the villagers, his lance on his shoulder. The further we advanced the more numerous the huts became. Sometimes there were clusters of several dozens, on both banks of the river. Cattle, sheep, and horses were everywhere in fair abundance. All the horses wore a light collar, from which depended the dried trophies, unmistakable signs that the victims of their masters had been men.

Horses, which in Danakil can only exist in chosen spots, represent extreme wealth, and they are only used on plundering expeditions. In these raids the assailants gallop up to a village, kill all the males they can find, and carry off the women and cattle.

I noticed many crocodiles in the river, but neither the Madima nor their cattle seemed to pay much attention to them. There were a number of women unconcernedly drawing water at the river's edge, and I saw a herd of about a hun-

dred head of cattle ford the stream. A few men formed themselves in two parallel lines in the water, and the cattle passed between them to the further side, while the Danakils yelled and beat the water with long branches. There were a number of men stationed along the banks, sleepily watching for carcasses of animals and other flotsam which the current deposits there.

We left Magu, and came to the foot of Mount Ayelu. It rose, an imposing cone-shaped mass, from the level plain. The absolute dearth of vegetation on that volcanic massif was a sign of what lay before us if we left the close proximity of the river, and indeed we soon saw that the thick grass through which we were travelling ceased abruptly at the edge of the mountain. Though the life-sustaining river was within rifle-range of us, yet that awful mountain hanging heavy in the landscape struck a dominating note of famine and death.

Presently, trees began to clothe the banks of the river again, and on coming to a large and shady group of them we decided to call a halt. The place was known as Rasdaza.

While waiting for the midday meal of guinea-fowls to be prepared, Pastori and I walked over the rich grass to the river's edge, where we shot a hippopotamus.

After our meal we had settled in the shade for a little rest, when the first visitors appeared. They were not of the Madima tribe, but were Danakils such as most of those whom we had met. They came to thank us for the hippopotamus we had killed for them, and which had stranded on the bank. They brought us a kid, and we in return gave them the usual beads and other small trinkets. They displayed an eager desire that we should shoot more hippopotami for them: their own rifles were useless for the purpose. Pastori and I complied, and went with them, while Rosina remained in camp for the better protection of our Plateau men. We considered it unwise to leave the latter alone in the camp, for the Danakils, while they show respect for a white man, were certainly not to be trusted alone with our native servants.

The arboreal belt was thin, and we reached the river with little difficulty, making our way for the most part by the paths which had been opened by the hippopotami themselves. We ensconced ourselves close to the water's edge, crooking our legs over the branches which dipped into the stream, in order to be shielded from possible attacks by the crocodiles below. Here we waited in silence for the river-horse to make his appearance.

One animal raised his huge head above the surface of the water a few yards from us, but on seeing us he retired below so quickly that, though we had our fingers on our triggers, we were not quick enough to fire at him. That beast, we decided, would not reappear for some time, as our presence must have frightened him. But a few minutes later a thick water-spout rose from the middle of the river, announcing the presence of another hippopotamus. In a moment he put his nostrils above the surface, in order to breathe. A dozen Danakils lay flat on the adjacent branches, or on the ground behind us, watching intently. They now opened their eyes wide, and their features grew tense with eagerness. Pastori and I had to take aim while counting in a whisper, so as to shoot together. Our double report rent the air, and a shapeless mass of turbid water rose on the surface of the lazy stream. A tremendous churning took place for some seconds, as though a ship's propellers had been suddenly set in motion there. In a moment it stopped, and large air-bubbles came up, amidst streaks of blood which widened and spread, running down on the chocolate-coloured water. Then everything was tranquil again.

All this had been followed in close detail by our new friends, who expressed their admiration with weird grunts and giggling, and such wild gesticulations that they made the branches shake dangerously. A ton of meat was assured to the tribe, and that was a momentous event. However, they were not yet satisfied, but insisted that we should kill

another hippopotamus for them. As the sport was attractive to us, we went with the Danakils to another spot, our friends skipping and jumping around us to show their delight. They led us to a small gap on the bank, from which we could shoot standing. Here we remained a quarter of an hour in silence, and then succeeded in shooting a third animal for the excited Danakils. They now had a greater stock of meat perhaps than they had ever had before, for their own rifles and ammunition were practically useless.

On returning to our camp we found Rosina conversing with the village chief, who had come across the river from the opposite bank where the huts of Rasdaza were situated. This worthy man, and other elders, remained with us, while the younger men went downstream in order to watch for the stranding of the shot hippopotami. Other natives continued to come to our camp, by ones and twos and threes, and all seemed highly pleased with our having shot hippopotami for them. They said they had supposed that Europeans wanted to plunder them and take away their lands, but instead they found us giving them presents. After saying this sort of thing to one another, and gaping their fill, they went downstream to join their fellows in the anxious watch for the great lifeless bodies.

After a while this pilgrimage brought with it a woman, the first and only one among all our visitors. She was accompanied by her father, who seemed to be a man of some importance, and she was prettier than any girl we had yet seen in that land. She was beautifully formed, and full of a natural grace, neither bashful nor awkward. But for her shiny coffee-coloured complexion, she might have passed for a girl of Southern Europe. Her colour and her file-sharpened teeth were alone at variance, for her manners and the natural sweetness of her address were in perfect good taste.

The father of this remarkable ornament of her race was evidently gratified by the admiration of her which our smiles

denoted, and he interposed no obstacle to our becoming better acquainted. Soon she was moving about our camp like an old friend. She accepted a few presents with a sort of exquisite grace and delicacy. Her name was Aysha, and I wish I could have spoken her language.

THE FALSTAFF OF GAWANI

DURING the night we observed numerous large fires on the opposite bank. The natives were gorging themselves with the flesh of the river-horse.

The next morning, as the sun rose behind Mount Ayelu, we departed. That terrific mountain, with its twin craters, seemed as though it might awake from its long sleep at any moment, to spread confusion and ruin all around it. The igneous covering of the ponderous massif was so free from erosion and so entirely barren, that one could almost imagine that one heard its terrible thunder, and felt the earth tremble under one's feet. The desolate volcanic hills, which stretched from the base of the mountain, were like great bloody scars on the pale expanse of sands and white clays.

The Awash, on our left, was noticeable only by reason of the haze that hung over it. Presently a swamp forced us to alter our course. It was not pleasant to be led towards this treacherous place by the guide whom our Rasdaza friends had recommended to us, and we soon came to the conclusion that he was not going to be of much use to us. The ever-increasing heat made the miasmal atmosphere more suffocating. As we walked through the swamp, stirring the mud, bubbles of fetid gas escaped from it. Sometimes we came to deep pools, which endangered our caravan. The guide tried

to console us by saying that the ground was worse closer to the river. It was again made clear to us that we were well justified in our desire to start as early as possible from Awash Station. Now that the rainy season had begun, the river valley would be swamped in many places.

We directed our march towards Mount Ayelu, and then waded across a sort of creek which extended from the river towards the volcano, and was the cause of the swamp. The ford was not difficult, though the water reached to the camels' shoulders. On the other side of the channel lay the open wilderness, dotted with thorn bushes and enormous ant-hills. The latter stood up like pillars, from ten to fifteen feet high. They looked like much weathered tombstones, strewn over the dreary country. This district next gave place to one of utter desert, on which only rare spiky bushes grew. It was a great relief to us when, after travelling for several hours in the pitiless sunshine amongst these dismal scenes, we saw in the distance some sandstone terraces, under which we hoped we might find some shade. Instead, our guide led us to a place amongst the horizontal strata, which was eroded in the shape of a horseshoe. In the centre of this depression there was a group of shrivelled mimosas and a small water-hole. We threw ourselves down in the thin shadow of the trees, but we found the water in the pool was salt and unpalatable. The place was called Faha.

A few sheep and three horses were grazing amongst the scanty grass that grew there. We expected every minute to see the owners of these animals, but they were afraid to come near, though they had doubtless been secretly observing us since the moment of our arrival.

Our camels, and also the mules, found something to eat here. The former usually fared far better than the latter, for they would not disdain to browse on dry thorn, in the absence of green branches. They would close their jaws on the rough twigs, and then, with a sideways pull, strip them of the bark and thorns and of any buds or shoots which grew on them. Sometimes, large thorns would stick in their gums.

or lips, and then they would show visible appreciation when one removed them. The longer you associate with your animals, the more human they seem to become, especially when the association is as close as ours was on this expedition.

The natives of the place, seeing that we had no intention of interfering with their animals, at last plucked up sufficient courage to approach us. We gave them presents, and they spent the remainder of the hot hours with us. When the sun was declining, we proceeded on our way, marching along the base of a low cliff. At one spot under it we saw half a dozen wells close together in line, each about eighteen inches in diameter. There was a little water at the bottom of them, but it was mineralized. It was clear from this evidence, and that of Faha that throughout the whole district water was scarce and bad.

We continued our march, and the slight interruptions in the monotony of the scene, which had been caused by the sandstone ridges, disappeared. We were once more surrounded by the infinite desert. When the sun is high in the sky, the landscape does not appear to change as one advances. The sun then seems to be always at the zenith, as though it could never again sink below the earth, and in that torrid heat and blinding glare the physical aspect of the land does not alter.

But, as God willed, shadows appeared, and lengthened; the atmosphere grew a little cooler. The crabbed thorn bushes seemed to rise with relief, and stretch out their crooked limbs; to lift themselves from the ground, whereon they had been crushed under the weight of the hammering rays. Behind us, Ayelu, touched by the level beams, assumed wonderful colours and reflections.

As evening approached, one could free one's neck at last from the swathing clothes, throw open one's garments, and revel in the relief of walking with the sun-helmet in one's hand, instead of on one's head, where it had been worn without a moment's intermission since sunrise.

Before dark, we came to a small group of huts in the wilder-

ness of the Gawani plain. We encamped near them, and the villagers, having assured themselves of our peaceful intentions—for we had not approached too close to their dwellings, and we had unloaded our beasts, instead of engaging them in battle—came thronging to make our acquaintance.

At Faha, our Rasdaza guide had begged to be paid and allowed to leave us, as he could not risk venturing further into the territory of a hostile tribe. He had indicated the direction in which we ought to proceed, and we had accordingly let him go, and so travelled the last hours without a guide.

The people of the village had received no news of our approach, and, as they had never seen a white man before, their surprise was considerable. Abdul Kader, our interpreter, explained us and our caravan very cleverly, and in a short time the whole population was at our service. They assisted our men to unload, and themselves took the animals to some hidden water-holes of theirs, known only to themselves, and jealously guarded. They also brought us forage and firewood, and in fact they pleased us highly by their willingness and hospitality. They even gave us milk, though their cows were very few and hardly likely to yield much in such surroundings.

We thought the least we could do was to have our tent pitched, so that the polite ideas of our importance, which the natives had formed, should have a little additional support. This was promptly put in hand, and our men were engaged in the task when we were surprised to see a compact cluster of people approaching us from the village. It was the chief, with his friends. Behind him, there walked a man carrying a folding chair, such as is used in public parks in Europe, or outside coffee houses in summer. It had doubtless reached this place after an endless series of plunderings, and was highly prized, for in the whole of Danakil there is hardly any finer product of civilization than a folding chair. Watching him, thus progressing to meet us with his portable throne, we already felt the chief was no mean man. Abdul Kader now began his work anew.

The chief's name was Abdul Momi. We offered him coffee, and he told us that only once before in his life had he tasted it: namely, on the occasion of the death of his brother Momi, whom he had succeeded as chief. We also offered him brandy, which was new to him. Our coffee, circulated among his people, had impressed them still more with our greatness and condescension. Conversation continued unabated, though night had fallen. It was after nine o'clock when the good chief took leave of us. He left an excellent impression with us. He was kind and jovial, and he had promised that on the morrow he would give us a guide, and bring us his presents.

We gave all the villagers gifts of tobacco, sugar, millet, flour, cotton cloth, and so on. The distribution was conducted in an atmosphere of pleasant animation, as was indeed usual in such cases, for each person wanted what the other had got. It was some time before the proceedings were brought to a close.

The next morning we rose early, in the expectation of leaving betimes. We waited in vain for the promised guide, however, and the sun was high in the sky when Abdul Momi arrived with his folding throne. He said that the guide was quite ready, but he begged us to stay and spend the day with him, because it was such an extraordinary and delightful thing that we should have thus appeared in his country unannounced. We could only delay our departure, though, with the prospect of journeying in the heat of the day, we felt that his cordiality was becoming rather more than we had bargained for. At ten o'clock in the morning it was above 130° F. in the shade, and from the torrid plain there came every now and then a breath of flame. Had it not been for the chief's pleasant manners, we should certainly not have stayed there. But Abdul Momi was too good to be lightly foregone.

Soon after his arrival, a kid was brought, his present to us. Then all his wives and children, and his children's children, came to kiss our hands. The older women soon left us to return to their huts, but the younger ones stayed a little longer. Finally, only three of the old gentleman's daughters remained.

They were pleasant girls, and were thrilled to see these fabulous Farangi, actually alive before them, and talking to them.

The portly chief ordered his people about in a quiet tranquil manner, always courteously and with a smile. The villagers squatted round our tent: the three daughters, with their father, sat inside. Abdul Momi was perched on his folding chair, holding between his knees a little naked boy, his son, of whom he was obviously very fond. Sitting thus at his ease, he told us all we wanted to know about his country, and asked us countless questions in return. We showed him most of our equipment, for he was extraordinarily interested in everything. An electric torch amazed him, and when once we had shown him how to press the button, we could not induce him to stop doing it. He called together all the elders who had come from the adjacent villages, and exhibited the wonder to them. They were much impressed with his power and wisdom, for he was the ruler of a wide district. He understood the wisdom of the Farangi: it was not for nothing that he possessed a folding chair. So Abdul Momi explained to his wondering audience the principles of the electric torch. It must have been an interesting exposition, for the old man's authority, Abdul Kader, had peculiar ideas on the subject himself. Abdul Momi next embarked on an investigation into the properties of the blades of safety razors. The study of these and other metallic objects absorbed his attention for some time. I then presented him with a hatchet, which pleased him highly. He was somewhat contemptuous of our table-knives, the blades being pointless and not strong. Then the inquiring fellow expressed a desire to see books. We showed him sheets of an illustrated newspaper, in which we had wrapped some of our gear. When he began to understand the meaning of the pictures, he proclaimed his delight with roars of laughter. He rose from the folding chair, wielding the newspaper at arm's length, and delivered a short lecture from the edge of the tent to the mob without. The flaps of our tent were raised all round, so that our visitors, sitting in

circles outside, might see all that went on within, to their universal enjoyment. The old man's daughters giggled with amusement, stroked the pages with their long fingers, and rounded their eyes with wonder and admiration, nestling innocently close to us.

Then mirrors were produced, and such was the effect caused by them that it is probable the tale of their advent will be passed on to many succeeding generations of the inhabitants of the Gawani plain. First, a small round mirror was handed as a gift to the chief. He looked at his reflection in it, knit his brows, turned the mirror upside down, looked in it again, passed it with some uneasiness from his right hand to his left, opened his mouth, shut it, looked more narrowly at his image, opened his mouth again, and, fairly convinced that the face reflected was indeed his own, seemed to grow downcast, and with a grimace of sadness put the revealing object by. The mirth and happiness had gone from his face, as the light leaves a lamp which is turned out.

His daughters, who, like the rest, had been observing the scene in silence, not knowing what to make of it, took up the mirror with a wondering curiosity. It had no saddening effect on them, but delighted them beyond measure. The mirror was next circulated amongst the crowd outside the tent. The elders studied their reflection gravely, the young people with amusement. More mirrors were produced, and distributed according to the will of Abdul Momi, who was careful to insure that only such of his officials as were considerable men were distinguished by receiving one. One of the old man's nephews was the most profoundly impressed by the new toy. When his uncle requested him to go to the village on some errand, this man, in the prime of life, walked away looking at his reflection in the glass, and smiling all the way along, without paying any attention as to where he was putting his feet.

We passed on to the subject of medicines. The chief asked for several specifics, and particularly desired to have some-

thing which could restore his former virility. The suspicion that his amorous powers were on the wane disturbed his peace. All this was imparted to us with an abundance of detail which would have made even a physician shudder, and yet it was evident the chief was doing nothing in the least unnatural, even though his daughters were standing there with us.

In the burning heat of Gawani, the hours passed, and still we enjoyed the jovial company of that old chief, the Falstaff of the scorched wilderness. He turned to the relation of his feats of war, telling us that he had already killed with his own hand, six men of the hostile Issa tribe. He unsheathed his great curved knife, and showed it to us. The blade was yet stained with the blood of his last victim. In pointing this out to us, he was careful not to touch the marks, for fear they should be obliterated before he had had an opportunity of adding new bloodstains to his trusty blade. He said he hoped to kill many more men before age should curtail his sphere of action. He begged us to stay with him and settle in his tribe, saying that he would then give us his daughters, and as many more women as we might wish to have. In addition to this, he said, he would levy a tax on every family living under his authority, to provide us with an adequate possession of cattle and goats. 'My people shall be your people,' he said; 'you shall have dominion over them, and with the aid of your valour we shall soon subdue all the neighbouring tribes. We could plunder them all, for none could overcome us. If one of you were to be killed by an enemy, your brothers from across the sea would come in hordes to avenge his death. If you want to shoot game I will have the country beaten for you, and the zebras driven against the precipices, so that you may catch them alive. My daughters, and the daughters of my dead brother Momi (here all present bowed their heads, for Momi had been a great chief) shall be your women. Stay, and we will live together like heroes.'

We told the old warrior that Europeans think of work rather than fighting and plunder; that their interests were the

cultivation of millet, coffee, and sugar, and the manufacture of mirrors.

To this astonishing statement he shrewdly made reply, 'But they make rifles, too, and ammunition. These things are used in your countries.'

We felt that we were being amiably cornered, but we replied valiantly, if irrelevantly, that in our countries only the Neguses and Sultans had the power to begin war, and that every white man was obliged to return periodically to his home in order to find out whether he was wanted in any war that was going on. He asked how big were the mobilizations which our Negus was in the habit of ordering. As he was not very advanced in the science of counting things, we spoke in images, telling him that our Negus commanded as many armed men as a camel has hairs, that they were supplied with as many cartridges as there are thorns in the forest, and so on. We then went into a long dissertation on cannon.

At noon the pleasant old man left us, but a little later he came back again, equipped, of course, with his folding chair. In the course of our conversation, we told him that we must take leave of him that evening, and said we should be glad if he would let us have the guide he had promised us.

In the late afternoon, accordingly, we took our departure, after hearty handshakes, during which the chief made us promise to return and make a long stay with him.

We marched through the desolate country to a village called Atofen, the chief of which, one Abdulla, was a nephew of the Gawani Falstaff. All the villagers stood in a crowd awaiting our arrival, for some of their number had seen us at Gawani in the morning, and carried home the tidings of our approach. We encamped at a hundred yards' distance from the huts, and the chief came to call on us, dressed in a khaki tunic and a loin-cloth. He was a middle-aged man, tall, thin, and rather sinister looking. He was a very powerful chief, being the supreme head of the Assaimara tribe, one of the sub-chiefs of which was his uncle, our Gawani friend.

We were alarmed to hear that there was a dania in the village. The inconvenience the dania at Kortumi had caused us was still fresh in our minds. This man was of a different character, however; he did not come from the Plateau, but from the borderlands on the opposite side of Danakil, to the south-east of where we were. He was obliged to treat the natives with great tact, for he and his armed escort could exert little authority over Abdulla and his numerous following. He lived in a hut apart, and had very slight contact with the villagers. He had come on a periodical visit, to induce Abdulla to pay certain contributions to the government, and to deliver them at the border. Abdulla appeared little inclined to comply, and it is hardly likely that the Abyssinian central government could have enforced compliance with its will in that remote place.

On seeing us, the dania immediately offered us his services, but mentioned that he could do little in those interior parts of the country. It was interesting to observe how a journey of a few dozen miles further from home changed the behaviour of the Emperor's minions. We showed him some papers, in order to forestall a possible demand to see our passports. They were mere letters, private correspondence, written in Amharic. We knew that neither the dania nor anybody else for many miles around could read. Yet the official pored over the sheets, showed signs of being fully satisfied with our credentials, and finally returned our papers to us. But when we adverted to our plans, both the dania and Abdulla spoke of the danger of proceeding to the north. They said the people were hostile to all strangers, and would imagine that our baggage was full of treasure. We should run the risk of being attacked continually, both by day and night. They advised us to change our plan. The discussion went on for three hours, during which time our servants were pestered continually with demands for presents, for the inhabitants of several adjacent villages had collected about our camp. The noise they made was distracting, and they would even intrude into our

tent where we were conversing with their chief, so insistent were they in pressing their requests. They were all armed with lances, and were without exception the most impudent of all the natives we had yet met on our journey.

At last the dania and the chief left us, and we were able to have our dinner in peace. After nightfall, however, they came again, and a great deal of talking and argument once more ensued.

When they finally went, we prepared to sleep. We had been obliged to place our lamp on a table at some distance from the tent, for the bright light had attracted quantities of white scorpions. Our beds had become filled with these creatures, and we had had them shaken out and made up anew.

On the morrow we rose at sunrise, but the whole of the village remained fast asleep. The sun was already well advanced in the sky when the first of the natives stirred, showing the extreme laziness of these savages, which is often the cause of the massacre of an entire village. Even the sentinels, placed to watch, commonly fall asleep, and do not raise the alarm until it is too late.

Now the dania came to see us. We offered him presents, and asked him not to raise difficulties to our advance, but rather to induce Abdulla to cease his objections. It surprised us to find that this dania declined to accept our gifts, but said he would do what he could to help us without reward. He had already told the chief that as far as he was concerned he saw no objection to our journeying to the north. But Abdulla was fearful that some disaster might overtake us while in his territory, particularly as there was in the vicinity a creditable witness in the person of the dania. Abdulla was studying to avoid the possibility of catastrophe overtaking us while we remained in his lands. His concern was to get us out of them, for we were a potential source of danger to him and his tribe. The recollection of the government's reprisals, after the massacre of the Greeks near Mount Kurbili, was still fresh in lower Danakil. The punitive force, composed of

Gallas and Amharas, had descended from the Plateau and annihilated, not only those clans who had been concerned in the massacre, but also those who had had nothing to do with it, but merely happened to live in the vicinity. Many thousand head of stock, the dania told us, had been confiscated or plundered from these unfortunate tribesmen, and driven on to the Plateau.

These horrible reprisals explained the desolation of some of the districts which we had passed through after leaving Wara Malka. The dania informed us that after the Gallas and Amharas had retired with their booty, the Danakils of the neighbouring tribes had fallen like wolves on the remnants of the devastated villages, and carried off such women and cattle as had escaped the onslaught of official justice.

The sun was high in the heavens when at last Abdulla came, accompanied by a brother of his from another village. This new member of the ruling family looked a bad man. The two brothers and the dania now gathered in our tent, and proceeded to drink more coffee and talk a great deal, until at last they reached a decision: namely, that we might leave on the following morning. They had discussed our affairs for three hours before coming to this agreement.

The heat of that desert was suffocating. Gusts of hot wind would continually blow stinging sand upon us, into our eyes and mouths, and our food, increasing discomfort to misery. When the three chiefs had gone away, the rest of the savages pressed forward, asking for presents. We distributed the usual trinkets, and both men and women seemed satisfied. We then ordered these importunate people to be driven away, and retired to the shelter of our tent.

At dusk, Abdulla's brother came for his share of presents, and if we had disliked him since his first appearance in the morning, he now showed himself to be even more unpleasant than we had thought him. His greed knew no bounds. He demanded rifles, or the equivalent of their value in thalers; he wanted sugar, coffee, everything he had heard we pos-

essed. We told him flatly he would have what we could afford to give to one of his secondary rank, and no more. When he saw that we treated him with cold contempt, he changed his ground, and said that he admired our pluck, for he was a plucky man himself. He was visibly chagrined to find that he had made use of unprofitable tactics in his designs on our property, but we continued to keep him at a distance, and would not respond to his hypocritical adulation. Before departing, he informed us that he was organizing a plundering raid against some neighbouring tribes. It was timed to take place as soon as the dania left their territory.

At daybreak we were ready to proceed. We handed over Wolde Gabriel to the dania, for he was unfit to travel, being always feverish. The dania would be able to take him as far as Afdam, whence he would reach Addis Ababa by railway. Though saddened at having to say farewell to his friends, Gabriel was glad to have the opportunity of returning home. He had always been afflicted with fear in Danakil, and I could see that it was beyond his power to control.

Our guide, supplied by Abdul Momi, was a quiet elderly man, who looked well adapted for the work. He had an assistant, a second guide, who had been sent to us the previous evening by Abdul Momi. Our friend sent us a message to say that the young man, belonging to a neighbouring tribe, had chanced to come to his territory on business. Being now about to return to his own clan, and his road lying in the direction we were to take, Abdul Momi thought he might be useful to us.

We were so disgusted at having been compelled to waste a whole day at Atofen, that we scarcely returned the parting salutations of the villagers, and even the smiles of Abdulla's pretty sisters failed to move us. Abdulla himself accompanied us for some distance, as he wanted to see that we passed the boundary of his territory without mishap.

DEATH OF BAYONNA

WE marched across the desert plain until we came to a place that at some previous time must have been a swamp, though it was now dry. The soil was cracked in all directions, and was covered with a heavy mat of dry grass of a curious yellow colour. It was pressed down, as though enormous rollers had been passed over it. The waters had evaporated, and the dying plants had drooped and fallen to the ground. Then the sun had imparted to the dry mass that golden hue, which was a new thing to our eyes.

In the distance, we could see the line of tall trees that bordered the river, towards which we were now directing our steps. It was the Oro Faghe, a branch of the Awash, which issued from the main stream, and then joined it again, leaving a long island behind.

After leaving Atofen, we had coasted for some time the base of the Sibabi hills, which are subsidiary features of the Ayelu, in a north-westerly direction. When we reached the conical eminences at the extremity of this ridge, we saw in an almost vertical cliff a group of dwellings in the natural caves in the rock.

Abdulla had lagged behind, and now we had lost sight of him. He had said nothing to us, and we did not feel called upon to wait for him in the torrid sunshine. The two guides directed our march towards the Oro Faghe, as the nearest

place in which we were likely to find pasturage and water. We crossed the dry swamp, and ahead of us the trees looked like mingled brush-strokes of violet and green. The violet ones were the trees whose buds had not yet opened, and the green ones were those whose leaves had appeared since the recent rain.

When at last we reached the wood, we found it very thick, and were glad that our camels would be supplied with food, water, and shade. For we proposed to halt at Oro Faghe until the next day, when we would ford the stream beyond its junction with the Awash. The place of our camp was excellent, except that there was little pasturage suitable for the unfortunate mules. As far as we ourselves were concerned, the compacted trees gave plenty of shade, and the river promised good fishing. In fact we could see the crocodiles eating large barbels.

In the afternoon we prepared hooks and lines, and Pastori and I went to fish. We soon caught several big barbels, and Pastori left me, with the intention of shooting something, as we wanted meat for our men. As for myself, I decided to have a shower-bath beside the river. Wolde Jesus drew the water for me in a bucket. The deep silence of the forest was, as it were, sprayed with a faint rustling of wind in the tree-tops, and the murmur of the water rippling against the branches which drooped into the river. Suddenly a rifle-shot seemed to shatter everything. For a moment, I thought it must be Pastori shooting game, but Wolde Jesus's colour had changed. A fearful anxiety distorted his face. Ten seconds passed: then two more shots rent the air, in quick succession. Yet other reports followed. This quantity of shooting was unusual. I ordered Wolde Jesus to return quickly to camp, and ascertain which of our men were out. As he was picking up his fishing-line, he told me that Bayonna, Wolde Georghis, and Makonnen had gone to cut grass for the mules. I dressed quickly, and went towards our camp. I was not far from the tent, when Dimisa crawled out of a thicket, and told me that 'the Dana-

kills were killing our men.' I had scarcely reached the tent when Makonnen arrived breathlessly, and said that Bayonna had been shot under the heart. A few seconds later Wolde Georghis appeared, much agitated, and said that as he was cutting the mules' grass with Bayonna, the younger of the two guides had approached them and started to talk with them. They could not understand one another very well, but were all quite friendly. All of a sudden the guide levelled his rifle and fired on Bayonna, at a range of about two feet. Bayonna dropped and lay still, and the guide turned and fired two shots at him, Wolde Georghis, as he fled from the spot. Georghis had managed to reach the bush where the two men had left their rifles when they began to cut grass, and, according to his account, he fired at the guide, and pursued him.

Now, Pastori was still out shooting alone, and his continued absence made us exceedingly anxious. Our men had each seized a rifle, and posted themselves about the woods. They were wandering without order or discipline, so I followed several of them and drove them back to camp. I had to wrest the rifles by force from some of them, for they were terrified of being left unarmed. It was rather like taking the only spar from a drowning man, but all the rifles had disappeared, and they had even left Rosina without one. A single rifle in the hands of a European is worth at least ten in the hands of savages.

We now awaited Pastori's return. At last he came, much disturbed on account of the shooting. We now decided that he should take four men, and endeavour to find Bayonna's body. Rosina, with half the remaining men, would stay to guard the camp, while I stationed myself with the rest half-way between Pastori and Rosina. If we were surrounded, there would by these means be a better chance of some of us making our escape.

At dusk Pastori returned, bringing with him the rifle, hat, and tunic of the dead man. The corpse could not be found



DEPARTURE FROM ORO FAGHE

We decided that we would make another search in the morning, for it was now getting dark, and we must make preparations for the night. We returned together to Rosina.

The old guide now told us that it was with his rifle that the assassin had killed his victim. To please the young guide, he had acceded to his request to be allowed to carry the weapon on the morning's march. I had previously observed that he possessed only a lance himself. In the evening the fellow, apparently wishing to have the pleasure of carrying the weapon again, had taken it up and gone out in the direction taken by our men. The murderer had now fled, with the rifle in his possession, and the old guide wanted us to return to Atofen immediately, for, he said, the Danakils would certainly assault our camp that night, or at dawn next day. We answered him that it would be easier to defend ourselves where we were than in a marching column.

We Europeans had planned that, in the event of our having to yield to superior force, we would try to escape through the forest, travelling secretly until we should come to a safer district. By moving only at night, and remaining stationary during the day time, we might hope to gradually make our way upstream to a hospitable place. We should be obliged to live on roots and the river water, but it would have been the only plan possible to attempt in a desperate case.

We now had our baggage arranged in the form of a hollow square, and we three Europeans, together with the guide and the interpreter, took up our position inside it. The remainder of our men were posted in the adjacent thickets. There were only twelve rifles and a fowling-piece between the fifteen of us. Our Amharas and Gallas neither slept nor chatted in the gloomy night hours.

Morning came, and we waited anxiously for the sun to rise, for the first moments of dawn are a favourite time for the Danakils to attack. Nothing untoward happened, however, and we presently made a reconnaissance in the woods, but found the place perfectly quiet. We returned to camp, and

loosed our camels and mules, to allow them to graze. Pastori and I then went out together, to try to find Bayonna's body and bury it. We found tracks where the slayer had dragged the body into a little hollow in the ground. Here the victim had been mutilated, and abandoned. We found shreds of Bayonna's flesh and clothing, where the hyenas had left them after fighting over the body. So ended poor Bayonna, a pleasant, kindly fellow, courteous and honest, reliable even in the most difficult moments. He was of a superior class to most of our boys, and they always addressed him as Ato Bayonna. We should no longer see him, always busy at something, in his broad-brimmed hat, with the kerchief under it so as not to soil it by direct contact with his head. He was the best of all our Plateau men.

Pastori now took the guide and a few men, and went towards the cave-dwellings, in order to find a man to send to Atofen to report to Abdulla what had happened, and to demand satisfaction for our man killed in his territory. Rosina and I were to wait till a certain hour for Pastori's return, and if he had not then appeared, we were to load the animals and move towards the cave-dwellings to meet him. The appointed hour came, but Pastori had not returned. We loaded, and left Oro Faghe, the monkeys throwing twigs down on us as we went. Before starting, our men had formed in a ring, each man close to his neighbour, and standing bare-headed, had sung a short prayer. It sounded infinitely sad, and I took off my sun-helmet, much touched by the pathetic scene.

We emerged from the thick arboreal belt, and faced the full glare of the sun. Travelling over the golden litter, we came to the cracked black mud, and so gradually approached the Sibabi hills. On arriving at the appointed place, we saw no trace of our friend. We inspected the cave-dwellings, but they were tenantless. Horrifying conjectures arose unbidden to my mind, as I stood with straining eyes, scanning the horizon in the wild hot desert. Presently, we were relieved of our anxiety by the sight of Pastori, coming from an entirely un-

expected direction. We were happy beyond words to have him with us again.

We now continued to retrace our steps of the previous day, in order to meet Abdulla. Several Danakils joined us, saying they had come to assist in our protection, for the murder had occurred in their territory, and they were anxious that retribution should not fall on them. Pending Abdulla's arrival, these people led us to a water-hole in the torrid plain. We reached it at about one o'clock in the afternoon, when the heat of the day was at its height. We unloaded near some thickets, which afforded a little shade. The chief of a neighbouring village arrived, together with several men and women, and all their cattle. They did not know what was to be the outcome of our affair, and they felt it was desirable to have their possessions close to their hands. We found ourselves the butt of all their curiosity, and we were pestered beyond words. The chief himself was like a gnat. He did nothing but beg of us, and ask us questions. We were occupied for three hours, talking incessantly, in persuading him to supply us with two guides to accompany us on our march northwards, after we had seen Abdulla. We gave him several presents in return for his good offices, but after all was settled he broke the agreement, without, of course, returning our presents. At last he ratified it again, when we agreed to give him a table-fork which he wanted to wear in his hair. But after this he asked for a spoon and a mug. These things he tied round his neck with a string, where they hung with three pairs of dried trophies which he wore. We had further trouble with this pest in compelling him to restore to some of our men things which he had shamelessly rifled from their pockets. Our Plateau men stood like sheep, not knowing what to do, while this thieving ruffian thrust his hands into their pockets; they merely turned their frightened faces towards us, as if to say, 'You will not leave us in the lurch, will you?'

We were so irritated by this brood of pilferers that we gave no presents to any of them, except the chief. Those which

we had given to him had been in return for his having provided the two guides. These guides now changed their mind, and returned their wages to us for the third time. We might have avoided all this annoyance at the beginning had we paid them in cartridges. But we made it a rule to try to avoid raising up new obstacles in the path of those travellers who might follow in our tracks hereafter. We dreaded that, by distributing rifle ammunition, we might be contributing to the death of men of our own race. Also when one is poor one can afford to be virtuous: we left Awash Station with no more than two hundred rounds.

At nightfall Abdulla had not arrived. We decided that we could waste no more time, and that on the morrow, whether he had come or not, we would go on our way with the two guides given us by the thieving chief.

Abdulla, however, made his appearance very early the next morning, and from four o'clock until seven we held a little preliminary discussion with him. It was agreed that we should ford the river a few miles below its junction with the Awash, and then travel down the other side in a north-westerly direction, so as to avoid the territory of the Alisara tribe. The Alisara, said Abdulla, were a bad tribe, and he did not want us to run the risk of having trouble with them. Abdulla would escort us in person to the ford. It might have seemed that the affair was now settled; but no, discussion had to go on for some hours yet.

We three Europeans, Abdulla, the old guide, and Abdul Kader the interpreter, sat together in the shadow of a small tree, surrounded by a ring of onlookers, who sat on their haunches in the sun. Their faces were sullen, and they spat steadily at intervals. Each man held his lance between his legs, and now and then one of them would raise his hand above his head to ward off the burning rays of the sun. The insignificant effect of that hand, kept a few inches above the skull, as a protection against the smiting fire, which took life and colour out of everything it touched, was ridiculous. Other

men stood leaning on their lances, with one leg twined round the shaft. Coffee and sugar were distributed amongst the more important of them, and then one of our men circulated through the crowd with a handful of sugar into which each man dipped a wetted finger. The last among them licked and quarrelled over the sugary hand. Other rings had been formed, each presided over by some elder, and these shifted their position according to the movement of the shadow cast by the bushes under which they sat.

The object of the discussions, now, was to determine whither the slayer of Bayonna had fled, so that the rifle he had stolen might be retrieved. The loss of the rifle worried them all far more than the loss of the man, the latter a trivial matter to their minds. A rifle belonging to Abdulla's tribe had passed into the possession of the unfriendly Alisara. That was the matter which absorbed the attention of chiefs and commoners alike.

A woman, the widow of one of Abdulla's people, had become the mistress of the murderer during his stay at Gawani, and she had followed her lover while he was with us. She now stood aloof from the other women who had gathered on the spot, being kept at a distance by order of the men. It was being said that it was at her instigation that her paramour had killed our man, for she had demanded a proof of his prowess. It was the loss of the rifle which now caused her own people to look askance at her.

This woman was summoned to stand before us, and Abdulla asked her to say where her lover had hidden himself. She answered not a word. Then Abdulla told her she had best make sure that the rifle was returned, or when they caught her man she would not see the whole of him together. She smiled back at him with an evil glint in her eyes, and all the maids in the crowd stared with fearful wonder at this calamitous woman, marvelling at her fortitude.

The discussions seemed as though they would never end, till at last we said that we wanted to eat, and our interpreter

had to help the other servants. Food was also prepared for Abdulla and the elders, and Abdul Kader joined them, for he was a Danakil.

The meal scarcely broke the interminable redundant discussion, and the awful session became more maddeningly irksome with every hour that passed. The restless foul-smelling people gaped upon us from all sides, and continually demanded gifts, or attempted to steal things. But the situation was dangerous, and had to be managed with tact. There were many times when we could plainly see that it was only Abdulla's authority that held the people in check. They were numerous, and could have overpowered us with comparative ease in the open country we were now in. One of our party had already been slain, the knowledge of which, there can be little doubt, had caused a stirring of the blood-lust of these men. Here we were, victims and rich loot, heaven-sent. A beginning had been made against our lives, and one could not yet tell what the end was to be. It was well for us that Abdulla was sufficiently wise and far-seeing to fear a ruthless retribution, and to do his utmost to avoid the grounds for it.

In the afternoon, when the sun had abated its fury, we loaded and left the place, accompanied by Abdulla and the guides. The latter had five times agreed to come with us, and five times changed their minds, because they were dissatisfied with the reward we had agreed to give them, and wanted something else.

We once more turned our faces in the direction of the Oro Faghe, and the mob watched with bitter scowls their forbidden prize depart in peace. We marched along the base of the Sibabi hills, and passed somewhat to the eastward of the place where we had been encamped when poor Bayonna had met his death. We found many more cliff-dwellings, which showed the primitive and savage state of the population of that neighbourhood. In those burnt valleys, where not a thorn bush nor a blade of grass ever grew, where no bird was ever seen, men



OUR CARAVAN MOVING PAST THE SIBABI HILLS

had come to seek shelter. They were destitute wretches who had escaped from raids, and come to hide away their starveling bodies in those grim rocks, hoping that in that remote and desolate place no man would come to take their miserable lives.

The plundering raid is the breath of life to the Danakils, as it is to all nomadic peoples. Their movable camp-villages can be packed up at a moment's notice, the women carrying the goatskins, the matting, and the bent sticks, and driving the cattle before them. The constant danger of being attacked by their enemies induces them to choose a position in a flat empty plain, in which to set up their primitive huts. In such a place no enemy can approach them unseen. Those of them who inhabit more mountainous districts, live in recesses and caves, which it is almost impossible to see from even a short distance. They seldom light fires, either by day or night, for their main obsession is to keep themselves concealed. Every tribe lives isolated from the others, and it is the constant care of all to be on the alert, either to fall upon and destroy those of its neighbours who are weak, or to elude such of them as are strong. When a tribe has chanced to enjoy a spell of peace, and has thus been enabled to increase its numbers, and its possessions of cattle, it never fails to excite the avarice of its neighbours. In such circumstances, a temporary alliance will often be made between two or more tribes, for the purpose of reducing a powerful neighbour, and acquiring its possessions of women and cattle. Once the object of the alliance is accomplished, it is immediately at an end.

Travelling only at night, and covering incredible distances with amazing endurance, a horde of men on foot, armed with lances and some few with rifles, will advance in silence to attack their enemies. Nor will the column rest if, after a long march, it should chance to reach its destination as the night is declining, for the assault invariably takes place at the first sign of daybreak. Neither side gives or expects quarter, but again and again battle is joined, until one side or the other

is seized with panic, when every male fugitive who can be caught is massacred. The women, cattle, and other spoils are then divided up.

As for the encampment itself, as soon as the alarm of the approach of an enemy is given, the inhabitants make some attempt to decide whether to flee immediately, or stand their ground. In either event, the preparations take but a few seconds. The women seize the smaller children, and drive the cattle away into ravines or hollows in the ground, where they cannot be seen. These hollows or crevices are the result of erosion of the calcareous soil. They form sunken mazes, which are invisible in the level surface of the plain, until one stands on their very brink. It often happens that the village is taken by surprise, through the sentinels being asleep, for there is no more slothful race of men than the Danakil. They are, indeed, more like wild animals than men, sleeping on the ground, living almost exclusively on raw meat and milk. No work spoils the elegance of their supple feline bodies. There are no bulging muscles in their long thin limbs. The ends of their shapely fingers can be made to curve back under pressure, as only the soft fingers of young girls can in our European races. An exclusive people, they have to this day no trace of the negro in them. Their type is a fusion of that of the ancient Egyptian and the Arab. The lines of their faces are clean-cut, angular, chiselled, and somewhat effeminate.

Abdulla, accompanied by some of his elders, marched with us at the head of the caravan, as it laboured over the stony ground. We descended into a valley, and came to a little hollow, at the bottom of which were scattered many bleached bones. It was a mass of the skeletons of human beings and cattle, who had died of thirst, and it probably represented all the wealth of some tribe which had hidden its possessions here on a fatal dawn, in order to save them from an enemy horde. They had been forced to remain in hiding too long, for when at last the storm had passed, they no longer had strength to reach the river. Hyenas, jackals, and vultures had

completed their doom. Those whitened bones gave a new awesomeness to the terrible landscape.

From these volcanic crags, we passed on, and came to rounded conical calcareous hills. They looked unreal, white and glistening in the setting sun. There was no grass, nor any trees or bushes; no birds flew in the air, not an insect crawled on the uneven soil. The long line of camels rocked slowly along amid the white severe hills, which looked like gigantic bleached skulls against the yellow sky.

As the sun set, Abdulla said we were close to a water-hole. It was in a deep ravine, and it seemed to me to be a dangerous place in which to spend the night. I insisted that we should go back to the head of the valley, though Abdulla assured us that the country was safe. However, we felt better when we had retired a little, and found a place where, in the event of being attacked, we should not have found ourselves trapped and powerless. The water-hole contained sufficient for all our beasts, though the water was muddy.

The place was called Dadda, and here we spent the night amongst the gloomy Assassibabiforo hills.

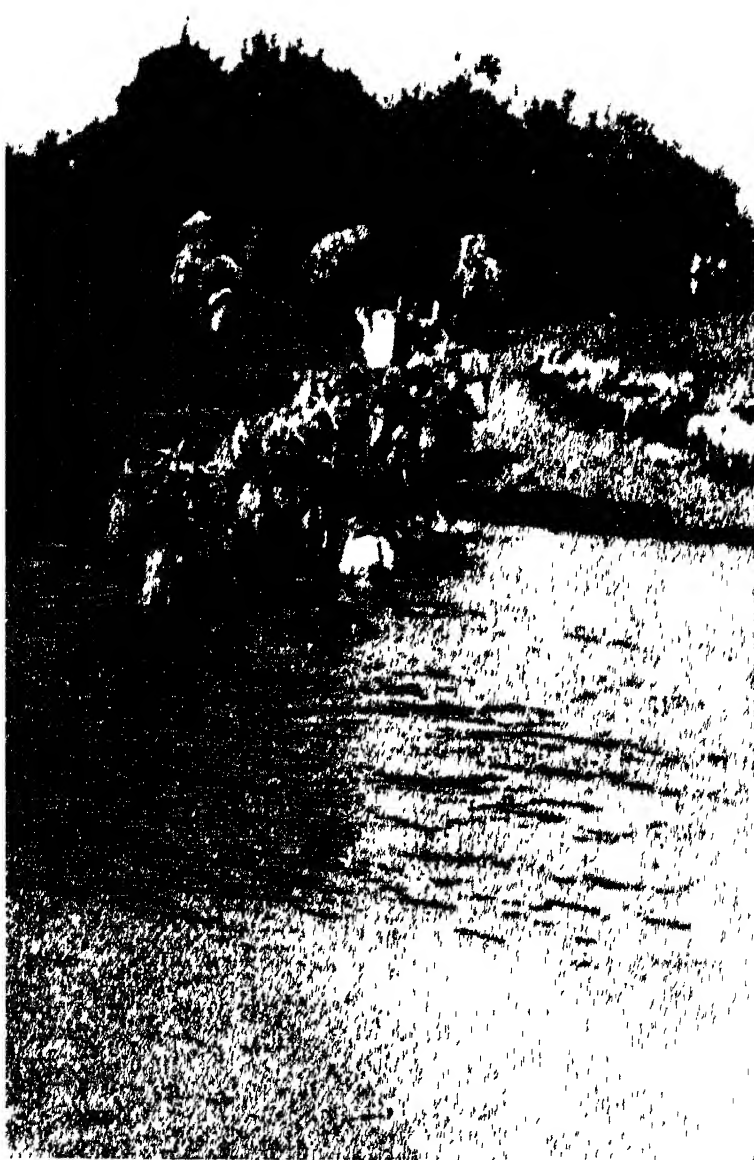
DADDA TO THE BORKENNA

ONLY in the full light of day did we fully realize the fantastic nature of the scenery about Dadda. To the west there were huge cones of sandstone and clay, curiously corroded by the weather. Some of them were crested by a volcanic intrusion, which cropped out in black combs. The action of wind and rain, which had cut deeply into the softer materials, had laid bare the hard igneous stone, which boldly stood in the shapes in which it had originally solidified. Further away there was a series of higher cones, all so alike, and so symmetrically spaced, that they seemed to have been placed there with careful order.

The ravine, winding tortuously at every stone's throw, was hidden from sight at no great distance. To the east, a wall of basalt cleft the white hill, and its dark crest stood prominently exposed. The ground in front of us gradually descended, as the valley opened like a fan, and the vast plain was finally lost in the haze which overhung the Awash.

We were about to move off, when the second of our guides reappeared. He had suddenly left us on the preceding evening, and we had supposed that he had absconded with the thalers which we had paid him in advance. He now explained that he had been delayed by his cattle, which had strayed from the road. He was accompanied by his wife, a bullock, and two calves, the whole of his possessions.

We journeyed forward on the desert plain, and soon



FORDING THE AWASH AT BARAKALA

came to a dry swamp strewn with golden straw, such as we had encountered on a former occasion. At last, we came within the shadow of the first trees of the forest, and directed our march to the ford. We made by no means an easy passage, for the water was deep, and the loads were partly immersed. The mules were obliged to swim, for they could not touch the bottom, and the men held on to the ropes' ends which hung from the camels. I myself swam across, and this seemed to surprise the natives, who had gathered on the bank to watch us. Their presence informed us that the news of our approach had already preceded us. The place was called Barakala. Abdulla's territory was bounded by the east bank, but he forded the river with us.

We stopped for the noon halt, and found a shady natural bower, which was made quite convenient with a few strokes of the hatchet. Monkeys were numerous, and they came quite close to us, showing more friendliness than the natives, who seemed sullen and not in the least curious. As soon as the latter saw that we were making preparations to settle in that spot, they went away without once looking back. We surmised that Abdulla's presence on their land was disapproved of, for he was a chief of the opposite bank, and no friend of theirs.

Two hours after noon we moved off again, having loaded as much water as we could carry, for we expected to find no water on the next two marches. Abdulla advised us to be always watchful and tactful with the natives, to keep close together, and never to march by night, and not to accept the services of any guide who was not recommended by a chief. He told us not to travel in too great a hurry, but to stop at the villages, in order to allow the Danakils to become familiar with us and our men. He seemed much hurt at the mishap which had befallen us in his territory, and kissed our hands at parting, a sign of great respect in a man of his standing. He told us that he would soon inflict retribution on the tribe to which the slayer of our servant belonged.

Our men saluted Abdulla with great respect, most of them bowing down and kissing his hand. The chief seemed regretful at our departure, and he walked in the wake of our caravan with Abdul Kader for a while. Presently Abdul Kader overtook us, and said that Abdulla had something more to say to me. Leaving the caravan to proceed, I turned round and rejoined the chief. Abdul Kader translated his parting injunctions. 'Keep to the west of the river,' he said, 'turn towards the Plateau, and climb until you reach the first markets. Increase the numbers of your men and animals, and reorganize your caravan. Do not travel in the Awash valley until you have done this. You are incurring a great risk in seeking to see our lands, but I know you take a great delight in putting our mountains and rivers on sheets of paper. You three are the first white men who have ever come into our country.'

I placed my hand on his shoulder in mute thanks, we shook hands again, and I quickly rejoined the caravan, which was receding over the desolate plain.

We had come to a sad and barren land, with slight undulations in it at intervals. After a while we sighted, and then passed, a very strange village. In the infinite white desert an isolated sandstone outcrop stood abruptly. Its sides were almost vertical, and it might have been a long low building. It was strange to see this great stone flung on the arid plain. On the top of it there were a dozen huts. The name of the place was Atawiafaburi, and it was the village to which the murderer of Bayonna belonged. We passed close to it, but saw no sign of human beings there. If any of the assassin's relations were there, they were closely hidden. All around us, as far as the eye could see, there was no other break in the empty wilderness, except the faint smudge of mountains in the far distance ahead. The heat was almost insupportable, yet it became even worse when we had at last crossed the plain and reached the Dulale hills. The narrow valleys amongst these hills were strewn with rounded boulders, showing the action of water throughout many centuries.

Wara Malka. It was his habit to change his nationality, or his religion, or both, according to the circumstances of the moment. After the murder of Bayonna, and whenever there had been danger with the Danakils, he had said aloud, so that all might hear, that he was a Muslim of French Somaliland, and that anybody who proposed to kill him was playing with the wrath of the French Government. To us Europeans, he would boast of being a 'true' Christian, a particular sort of Christian in the European manner, and would show us a small medal with an image of the Virgin on it. The Plateau men were Coptic Christians, low fellows.

When we gave orders, or had occasion to reprimand anybody, Joseph invariably added his voice to ours, as a sort of chorus, and, though we ordered him to be quiet, he would continue to mutter what we had forbidden him to say aloud. Or he would come close to us, and say under his breath, but loud enough for us to hear: '*Ces sont des nègres, comprendre rien, bêtes nègres,*' in his kitchen French. When, after our distributions of presents to the natives, the time came to shut our boxes, it pleased Joseph to chide the insatiable Danakils, and push them away — provided the proceeding had already been made safe by the fact that their chief had ordered them to retire.

This Joseph was a man of some thirty years, gaunt and covered with scars. He had learnt bad habits from the native merchants of the coast. We could never discover whence he originally came, for he would make assertions, and then brazenly contradict them at the next turn of events. He had hoped, on joining us at Wara Malka, that we would appoint him our interpreter. But, apart from the fact that he knew only a few words of French, he was so little to be trusted that we would not have ventured to employ him in that capacity even had he been a distinguished professor of the language. He was never tired of trying to insinuate unpleasant charges against the other men.

Joseph was dressed in tattered garments, but he would

never leave off any of his rags, for he believed that the more he wore the more important he became. When he wanted to pass as a Muslim, he would wind one of his rags round his head as a turban.

Now, if Joseph was disliked by the others on account of his despicable character, there was another who was regarded with even greater distrust. This was Wolde Georghis, the Castrated, so nicknamed on account of his thin voice. After the death of Bayonna, the idea had been gradually taking root in the minds of the men in general that Wolde Georghis was the evil genius of the caravan. At first we Europeans laughed at the notion, but we soon saw that it was no laughing-matter to the rest of the servants, or to Georghis. Not one of them cared to be near him; no one would cook, or eat bread and meat, with him. He was obliged to gather his own little supply of firewood, and draw his own water, being denied the benefit of living communally with his fellows. Thus, after finishing his turn at watching over the animals while they grazed, Georghis had to light his fire, and prepare his solitary meal, just as though he were alone in those deserts, without a living soul in sight.

On a certain evening, this unhappy man came to complain to us that he had no fire with which to cook his food, and boil the water for his tea. He had asked the other men to help him, but they had refused him everything, and now it was night, and he could not go to find what he lacked. He had been, till late, employed with the camels. He concluded by saying that if things were to continue in this way his life was as nothing to him, and that it were better that he should die. The lonely man broke down.

We gave him what he needed, and thereafter we tried our utmost to change the foolish attitude which his co-religionists, the Plateau Copts, had adopted towards him. But we could in no wise succeed: they continued to keep him at arm's length, only acceding to our command to allow him to join them in the labour of fetching wood and water, and to take

away his share of them separately. In everything else, they continued to avoid him completely.

The foolish man had boasted of being skilled in black magic, and had asserted that it was for that reason that he had been spared when Bayonna was killed, though they had been standing close together when the treacherous guide had fired on them. It was by reason of these sayings of his that Wolde Georghis had become the object of the continual curses of the rest of the men. Osman asserted that the chest complaint from which he was suffering had been caused by spells cast upon him by Georghis, and on a certain day there was a ferocious fight between the two men. If a camel fell for no observable reason, or if a load became unbalanced during the march, it was then Settie's turn to curse the unlucky man, for the camel was sure to be one which Wolde Georghis had helped to load. Between the insults of the bold, and the shunning of the timid, the life of this unfortunate man had become a burden to him. Troubled, embittered, he had resorted to living and working alone, not daring, for his very life, to deliver those magical curses whereon at the beginning he had hoped to find a basis for asserting his authority over the others.

In order to avoid trouble, we found him work which brought him as little as possible into contact with the others. This was to carry a long bamboo pole, the ridge pole of Rosina's tent, an unwieldy thing that could not be loaded on a camel, and also a hurricane lamp, and a tin of kerosene which leaked, and had to be carried in a special way so as to avoid further loss.

Wolde Georghis wanted to be always near us, at the head of the caravan, but in that position his long bamboo pole was sure to get in the way of some of the men who followed. For the same reason, we could not put him to march in the group of men who marched beside the camels. We decided to place him last of all.

Needless to say, Joseph, who had no concern at all with the matter, ratified our decision, and stretching out an arm which

issued from a sleeve in ribbons, yelled at Georghis: 'Nègre bête, marchez vite! . . . Derrière! Derrière! Jamais ici,' adding, in Amharic, that in the order of precedence the position of the unfortunate magician was behind the tail of the last camel.

As the storm passed over the Buri plain and the Dulale hills we proceeded steadily on our way, leaving the perfect cone of Mount Afodella to our left. Everywhere was desert: there was neither vegetation nor water in sight. After marching for six hours, we decided to halt where we were, in the wilderness. We issued some water to the men, and had our camp prepared. We were becoming alarmed about our animals, particularly the mules, for they had now been marching without proper food for eight days. At Oro Faghe and at Barakala, the camels had found some bushes to strip, but the mules since leaving Rasdaza had passed eight days of practical starvation. On the morrow we expected to reach the Iarra torrent-bed, where wells were to be expected, and we hoped to have the good fortune to find grazing for our animals there too.

That night, we were obliged to order the guide's wife to stop talking, for, in accordance with Danakil manners, she went on chattering for hours, as though nothing but death would stay her tongue. With a few effective words, we succeeded in silencing her.

We moved off at dawn, over ground literally covered with boulders and cobbles, which looked as though an immense torrent had deposited them there. We came to ranges of low hills, which barely rose out of the surrounding flatness. These were succeeded by a desolate white plain of clay, which glistened in the sun. There was no sign of life: only the long tine of our caravan enlivened the dead scene. It seemed as though we were in a world of boundless arid plains, where no life had ever existed. There were a few indications of slight rises and eroded terraces, but these were in the last stages of being levelled with the surrounding expanse. The blistered soil

curled in little crusts, that crumbled into powder under our feet, with a noise which might have been the sound of a feeble voice, raised in protest at the tread of the first European feet it had ever known. On this ground, the caravan left a trace, a wake, which could be clearly seen from a considerable distance. It was a sign that would last scarcely longer than a ship's wake on the face of the ocean, for the first gusts of wind, or drops of rain, would speedily obliterate it.

We crossed the dry beds of two very shallow torrents. They seemed mere lines and markings in the landscape — the landscape which seemed not of this world, so empty and strange was it.

At last we saw in the distance a tomb, made with dry branches piled together. In these infinite plains, where no building material is available, it is easier to carry tree-trunks and branches from a distance than stones, in order to mark the burial-place of prominent men. The devoted care of the relations and friends shapes the memorial in the form of a rough cone, branches being piled like the supports of a conical hut. A single aperture is left at the base, to serve as a doorway. A few feet to one side of the structure, some square yards of ground are enclosed by a fence of dry branches, piled one upon another. In this enclosure, sacrifices of cattle are made at certain seasons. Before the entrance of the tomb, a number of large stones are placed on edge in a line. Each stone represents a human victim, whom the dead man slew with his own hand. If numerous, the stones are set in two parallel rows, as though bordering a path leading to the entrance. In the boundless fiery plain, this solitary tomb gave rise to a kind of dismay. So bare and stark was the object, so exposed its position. No cool friendly shadow, no scented forest air, cast the balm of peace on that last resting-place of an unquiet man. Perhaps it was right and appropriate that no such tendernesses should grace that arid tomb: fourteen stones, aligned in a double row, stood before the entrance — a mute, pitiless record, savage, sad.

It is in such places as these, grim and remote, that the Danakils prefer to bury their dead. On the steepest and most inaccessible of the craggy hills there are many cairns of piled stones. These too are tombs.

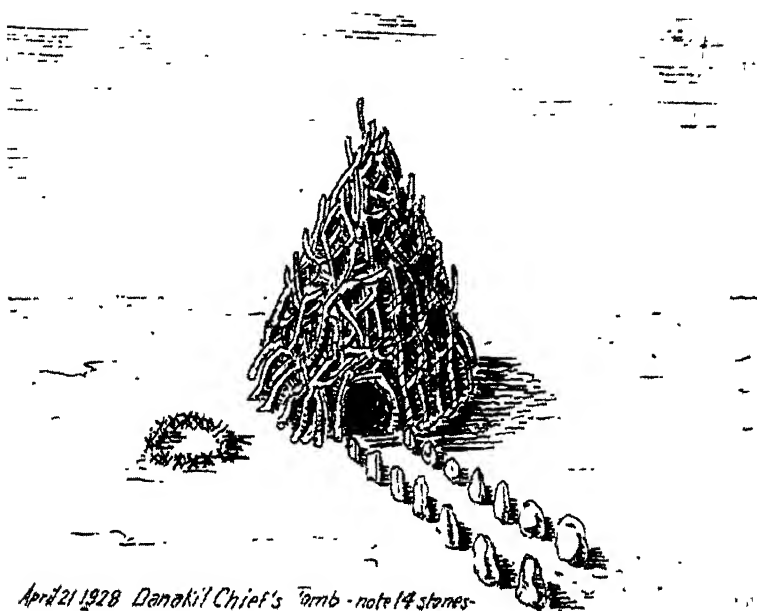
We continued to march over the calcined plain, the white soil of which was broken by wide belts of pebbles, strewn there by the floods. At last, after a march of seven hours, we halted in the arboreal fringe of the Iarra, which here cut the plain. The torrent was not flowing. We looked for pools in the watercourse, and were fortunate enough to find one large enough to serve the needs of all our men and animals. The camels found some thorn to eat, but the mules had to go hungry again. We were highly alarmed on their account, for they had now endured for nine days without any food to speak of.

There was no advantage in lingering at the Iarra, so in the afternoon we loaded and moved off again. It was becoming a case of having to reach regions capable of supporting life while our energies remained to us.

We abandoned a camel which could go no further. We left him near the water-hole, and placed a heap of branches near him, in the hope that he might eat, and perhaps recover sufficient strength to move about and defend himself from wild animals. This was the first camel we had lost. He watched us go unmoved, as their manner is. Settie said, 'They [camels] are like bottles, which once broken cannot be patched up again, and, sadly enough, the only thing you can do is to throw them away.'

Along the wooded course of the Iarra, the animal life of the plain had concentrated. There were some bucks, including dik-dik, and also francolins and guinea-fowl. We did a little shooting for the members of the different religions.

We soon crossed the narrow belt of vegetation, and came to the open desert again. As we proceeded, there was nothing to attract our glance save a few tombs, here and there, on the horizon. Evening came, after hours of laborious marching.



April 21 1928 Danakil Chief's Tomb - note 14 stones

A CHIEF'S TOMB, BUILT OF DRY BRANCHES
and with fourteen stones set in a double line, to indicate the number of his human victims



THE HUTS OF ATAWIAFABURI
built on a rock in the middle of the desert plain (See page 168)

During the afternoon, heavy clouds had gathered, and we had feared that we should be unable to continue marching at night, owing to lack of light. But strangely enough, we had all the light we needed, for it filtered through the clouds in a way for which we could not account. There was no moon, and yet in spite of the heavy curtain of vapours weighing on the atmosphere, there was far more light than there would have been had the stars been shining from a clear sky directly upon us. The air was unexpectedly cool, and we marched so easily that we covered a far greater distance than we had dared to hope on leaving the Iarra. The ground was firm and flat. Presently we reached a second watercourse. The light had now vanished, and we were in pitch darkness. As we came to the ground that sloped to the torrent-bed, we stopped, afraid to move further in the obscurity which now enveloped us. We felt it was out of the question to send men to search for water, and we therefore issued rations from that which we had brought with us from the Iarra. We tethered the animals securely, so that they should not break loose to search for food, and so stray away in the darkness. This night even the Danakil woman was silent. She lay near her cattle, which were so tired that they had no strength to wander, but reclined on the stony ground, without any need of being secured.

Pastori and I pitched our tent for fear of rain, and Rosina rigged his where our hurricane lamp hung from a lance stuck in the ground. We had no sooner retired to rest, however, than a strong wind arose, and at the first gust blew down Rosina's tent, breaking the long bamboo pole in the middle. Rosina joined us in the larger tent.

We had tethered the mules to a small dry tree, near where we lay, and the poor animals, after having eaten all the bark, were now gnawing the wood. During nine days, they had eaten nothing but an occasional handful of millet flour, and sometimes an unpalatable thorn, or leaf. That night the breaking of the branches, and the dull sound of the masticat-

ing and grinding of their poor teeth on the hard splinters kept me awake. The noise was not loud, but the thought of the sufferings of the animals was harrowing.

The wind maintained its fury; every gust shook our tent rudely, jerking the ropes taut, as if it would lift it off the ground.

When morning dawned, we received a great and pleasant surprise, for we found we had encamped at the very foot of the Abyssinian Plateau. On the previous day, by reason of the thick haze, we had seen nothing which could tell us how near we were to the uplands. Then our long night-march had taken us to the base of the Korbati chain, a little to the east of the Ardgera summit. The torrent-bed which we had reached in the darkness was the Borkenna, and we had struck it at the point where it issues from the mountains. The beautiful peak of the Ardgera towered directly before us, little white clouds drifting about its summit. These were no threatening volcanic mountains such as the Ayelu. There was vegetation on them. The oppressive miasma of the Danakil lowlands along the Awash had been left behind, and here the air was light and pure. We were already out of the desert, and it now remained to us to scale the mountains, and travel in search of some market-place, where we might buy stores and reorganize our caravan.

We crossed the Borkenna, which went eastward to join the Awash in the great plain we had left behind us. The stream was not flowing at this season, but as we passed further into the ravine, we came to beautiful clear pools, where we filled our goatskins with the purest water we had seen for a month. Birds and game abounded.

At first the ascent was easy, but soon we were faced with huge boulders and stones. Ahead of us towered the forbidding Galla mountains.

ERIFIBLE

WE slowly made our way up the Borkenna gorge. Soon we were obliged to abandon another camel. The beast had gone unloaded for the last two days, wailing and grumbling continually; but he had managed to keep with the caravan. At the point at which we had now arrived, however, the mountains were too steep for him. Our previous marches had been difficult, nor had it been possible to find pasturage and water for the animals at the end of each stage. The abandoned camel watched us pass on amongst the boulders. His eye was without lustre, his breathing laboured, and these were bad signs. Nevertheless, if he should have recovered some of his strength there, after resting, he could have descended to the Borkenna with comparative ease, and there found water and forage.

At one point of our ascent, we could see the gorge we had left, at right-angles to our line of march. Both sides of it were plunged in shadow, except some projecting rocks which caught the sunlight. Rare birds hovered about us, or flew from crag to crag. A primeval silence reigned, and it seemed as though the place had never been violated by the presence of man.

After marching for two hours more, we reached the rounded top of the mountain which faces Ardgera across the Borkenna, from the north-east. Instead of finding a steppe there, we saw

interminable mountains all around us. We descended from the summit, and travelled for two hours towards a distant torrent-bed, by which we hoped to be able to advance into the interior. The descent was dangerous to the camels, whose feet were ill-adapted to those rough and stony slopes. It was painful to see them lifting their long legs high at every step, like men on stilts. In five hours we did not come upon a single place where we were able to walk several consecutive steps on ground unencumbered with rocks. Every step required close attention. One pleasant change had occurred, however: the irritating prickly heat had left our skin as soon as we came into the mountain air.

At last we came to the torrent we had sighted from above, and we were delighted to see, in some of the wider parts of its course, clusters of mimosas, thriving on the small quantity of earth which had lodged amongst the stones. There were also several pools of crystal-clear water. Presently we came to a group of large mimosas, under which was a party of men and women. They were Danakils of the borderlands, and were resting in the shade of the trees while they kept watch on their grazing cattle. I sat to rest with them while the caravan went on, and watched some of them producing fire in their primitive way. Three men sat on the ground in a close ring, one of them firmly holding down to the ground, with his foot, a piece of wood. In the upper side of this piece of wood a small hollow had been gouged out, probably by means of a sharp stone, and in the hollow one of them placed a bit of dry cotton, or fibre. One of the others placed the pointed end of a short stick in the cotton-filled hollow, holding the stick vertically between the palms of his hands. This man then began moving his palms across each other in opposite directions, as if he were rubbing them together, and thus caused the stick to revolve rapidly, changing the direction of its motion with the alternating movements of his hands. It required very rapid motion to make the cotton ignite under the point of the stick, and the operator soon became tired of rubbing his hands

together with the speed of lightning. But, without stopping, he relinquished the stick to his neighbour, who had placed his hands in position to receive it and immediately went on with the twirling. When the second man had grown tired, the third took charge of the stick, and continued to manipulate it. More than five minutes of this activity went on, when of a sudden, the first thread of smoke curled up from the stick's point. The efforts of the twirler still went on, and the smoke increased in volume. Then one of the men picked the cotton out of the hollow, and, without a moment's delay, inserted it in a little ball, the size of a walnut: This was a piece of dried camel-dung, which had been hollowed out. The cotton starts a slow fire in the dung, and there is the source of fire for the whole camp, fire which will not be allowed to die out as long as they remain encamped in that spot.

The Danakil system of making fire is rudimentary. The Egyptians had mechanized the vertical stick of this apparatus more than four thousand years ago. They had obtained the alternate circular motion by means of a leathern thong, which wound and unwound around the stick, as in antiquated hand-drills. Where, save in Danakil, can one still see this primeval method in everyday use?

I left the three men under the tall mimosas, which shot up beside the soaring wall of the ravine, and rejoined our caravan.

As we proceeded, we met with goatherds, who looked at us deferentially but without fear, although we came upon them unannounced. Some of the men carried clubs, but their glances and gestures, like their armament, denoted habits less warlike than those of the lance-bearing Danakils of the lowlands.

After six hours' marching up the torrent bed, we stopped and unloaded. Water was plentiful, and there was grass for the mules. Basalt masses overhung our heads, as if about to fall and crush us in the grass of our diminutive meadow. Most of the rocks were impregnated in parts with metallic coloura-

tions, splashed with amethystine manganese, and here and there a streak of ochre, red or yellow.

We remained in this place for the rest of the day. We were at an altitude of 3000 feet.

On the morrow we started early, and, after a short time, came to a place where the ravine widened. Here we left the torrent-bed, and a smooth rise to the left led us to the round top of a mountain, where we found the ground and the landscape similar to those of the fertile Abyssinian terraces. One could see stretches of tender green grass on every side. At last our poor mules could eat their fill. We gradually descended the opposite valley. In the distance we could see groups of huts, far better built than those of the barbarians of the Awash valley, though of the same type. They were surrounded, however, by walls of stones, or piled sods. At noon, which here was cooler than we had been accustomed to, even in the early hours of the morning, we came to the base of a hill which was topped by a village called Budaia Muhammad. The district was called Daoc.

Before we had finished unloading, the whole village had descended to see us. Last came the chief. He was a sociable and decent man, who at once sent us two mule-loads of water in goatskins. It came from the wells of Eba Ledara. Many women brought us milk and firewood, anticipating the presents which our servants had told them would be forthcoming. All day long the villagers were coming and going in our camp, for even here we represented a rare sight to the populace. The people would stand open-mouthed, for minutes together, to watch us from a little distance, noting our every movement.

We gave the chief, Budai Aman, a present suitable to his station. His was the last Danakil village. Beyond it to the west was the country of the Gallas. Our new friends, though far more civilized than the lowland Danakils, submitted to the supremacy of the Amharas and Gallas, to whom they paid tribute. Instead of the savage boldness of the lowland Dana-

kils, they exhibited the painful aspect of the wild animal caged and enslaved.

According to Budai Aman, it was not true that, had we continued to travel in the Awash valley, we should have met with those difficulties of which Abdulla had warned us. But we had no reliable means of deciding as to which of the two was right. We told Budai Aman that our object, after buying supplies and reorganizing our caravan, was to journey to the Aussa by way of the left bank of the Awash.

We passed the day quietly, and our Plateau men were all delighted to be in their natural surroundings again.

On the morrow, we took to the road again, skirting the base of the hill, and then turning westward up an endless incline. We were followed by some of the villagers of Budaia, and when they fell away, others from nearer villages took their places. From distant mountains, where news of our advance had already been received, people descended and marched to a point where, hours later, they would be able to see us as we passed. Thus, we frequently saw a group of men issuing from the thick bush at the side of our path, a group which we had long before detected marching like a cluster of ants at the bottom of a distant valley, or stepping down a mountain flank. Our route lay along the crests of a range of mountains, some parts of which were 5000 feet in altitude. Here we saw *Euphorbia candelabra*, spiked like the fingers of a hundred hands, raised skyward. Our Plateau men were touched by the sight, for this was one of the plants typical of the flora of their own land. We passed close to a market village of no great importance, called Gabaro, but did not halt, as we wanted to reach a larger place.

Towards noon, the signs of cultivation had become more prominent. There were gently sloping valleys, divided up by low stone walls: seen from the crests of the range, these were like patch-quilts spread out in the sun. We saw yoked oxen at work, and plough-teams became more and more numerous, for the cultivators were preparing the soil for the sowing

crops. Villages and groups of huts became more frequent: the huts were no longer of the primitive type, pieces of coarse matting thrown over hooped sticks, but were the tukuls of the Plateau. Pleasant to our eyes was the sight of these dwellings, standing on the summit of a hill or on the curve of a mountain side, outlined against the sky. They are built in the form of a shallow cylinder, of interwoven staves and pliant sticks, plastered with mud mixed with millet chaff. The roof is a shallow cone, on the apex of which is a piece of carved wood. Here was some attempt at constructing permanent buildings, signs of order and industry. These people were Gallas. They are the traditional enemies of the Danakils, and will occasionally descend into the Awash valley to attack them. They are more numerous, and richer in firearms, than their enemies, and always succeed in defeating them.

We felt some anxiety when we discovered that our two small Massowa Danakils, Abdul Kader and Abdulla, were no longer with the caravan. It was not unlikely that disaster had befallen them in the midst of these Gallas, amongst whom no Danakil could be considered safe. Fortunately, the two boys soon reappeared. They had left the path in order to drink at a water-hole in a side valley, having seen men drive mules laden with water-skins down that way.

We travelled at a fair pace in the buoyant atmosphere, and at noon we halted at a pretty spot in the trough of a valley, through which ran a torrent called Ija. We made our camp under the trees, choosing the place where there was most shade. It so happened that this was where a rivulet ran in its rocky bed, and our table being placed exactly over it the water ran between the legs. Sitting about the table on boxes, we filled our drinking-cups straight from the little brook which ran at our feet, whenever we wished to drink. After the parchedness and dearth of water, even of bad water, in the lowland plain, it was a great blessing to have an unlimited supply of the pure element within arm's reach. It seemed to me that I had nothing more to wish for, so little, at times, suffices to content us.

We slept better that night than we had done for a long time past. On the morrow, after a few hours' march, we arrived at Erifible, a market-place lying in the centre of a vast amphitheatre of hills, on the slopes of which there were numerous huts. The actual market was situated in a sort of sloping stony field. The trunks of the trees scattered about in it were smooth and greasy, polished by tethering-ropes, and the rubbing of animals' bodies. The lower branches had been lopped off, either to make the upper branches spread more, and so afford better shade, or else because they were easily reached by anybody who wanted a stick with which to make a fire, or hit a mule. Stones arranged in circles of varying size, from a few inches to several feet in diameter, lay everywhere. These were the market-stalls, in which the merchants displayed their goods. At the lower end of the market-place, a small torrent-bed, in which were some water-holes, ran through thickets. When we arrived the market was silent and deserted, but many signs indicated the activity with which it was wont to be animated on market-days.

To the right, a line of euphorbias stood like a wall, and to the left acacias, mimosas, and thorn-bushes grew thicker and thicker, until the mass became merged in the dense forest which here clothed the mountainside. These slopes were marked with broken lines, like deep scars in a woolly hide: they were the steep and stony torrent-beds, now dry, through which passed the roads to the west.

We had travelled from the Borkenna without guides, for there the two who had accompanied us from Abdulla's camp had left us. They had shunned the prospect of venturing amongst the hostile upland tribes. But in this country where water was abundant, and where peace reigned at present, guides were unnecessary. We now had to wait for the next market-day. These occurred twice a week. At these times the population comes down from the surrounding hills, carrying the produce of the soil, and driving their cattle before them, in order to barter with the merchants who bring imported articles to dispose of. Some twenty-five miles to the north-west

lay Batie, Dessie, and other centres of some commercial importance. Erifible was the most advanced Plateau market towards Danakil.

In the afternoon, Pastori and I went to see the neighbourhood, and to shoot a little game; and, after that, visitors began to arrive, including the chief of the village of Gore. In the course of conversation, the latter asked us to exchange his rifle for one of ours, as he was unable to obtain cartridges to suit his. As we had scarcely enough rifles for our own needs, we were unable to oblige him, but we gave him a small rifle-telescope which was of no use to us as it did not fit any of our rifles. We showed him how to use it, but he was unable to grasp the idea of how it had to be focused on an object. He scanned the whole horizon and the sky with it, his hand shaking unsteadily, and enumerated the many beautiful things which he saw through it, things which we looked for in vain. Then all the elders looked through the instrument, and saw distant towns and districts, which were hidden from us by the surrounding hills. None of them saw the cross-wire of the telescope itself, which was the only thing I could see with the instrument focused as they had adjusted it. A native came to sell us a small bottle of brandy, called Mataxia. But it was an old bottle, containing nothing but unclean sweetened water.

More chiefs came to see us, and I was frequently asked to repair our guests' firearms. They had not the slightest aptitude for understanding mechanical things, and could not replace in position two parts which they had removed from the simplest contrivance. Yet they often tinker with their rifles as monkeys might do, out of mere stupid curiosity. When they have removed a few screws, and lock, stock, and barrel fall apart, they are quite unable to join them together again, and must wait until some 'superior' person chances to come their way. Our men had taken note of my reputed great cunning in these matters, and consequently, in the course of our travels, I often had to turn gunsmith. As the healer of palsied

firearms, I had their useless weapons brought to me to be made whole — rusty pieces of old iron, wrapped in rags, or preserved in a goatskin sheath. The owner would look at me with a fascinated smile, his eyes shining with anticipation, supposing that the moment I touched his rattling jumble of corroded relics they would be turned into a beautiful new rifle, ready to fire. I did what I could with their old obsolete rifles and pistols, and the joy of the owners was touching. Some of them must have waited years, in the remote hope that one day somebody would come and put right their treasured weapons.

Meanwhile, millet was being ground into flour for us in the adjacent villages. The work was done by women, kneeling on the ground with a large flat stone, made smooth with much use, lying before them. A handful of grain is poured on the stone, and then, taking another stone in her hands, the woman crushes and grinds the millet into flour.

The third day after our arrival was market-day, and a crowd of people flocked into the place. In the market-place a host of articles were displayed for sale — knives, lances, iron and brass bracelets, earthenware, horn trinkets, hide buckets, skin bags, tobacco, millet, and ground pepper. Of the last the natives are very fond. It is called *berberi* on the Plateau, and large quantities of it are everywhere used for seasoning their food. It is also used in the manufacture of a violently potent sauce. All the goods were displayed in small heaps on the ground, within the stone circles. In some cases a raw bullock-skin, blanket, or piece of matting, was first spread on the ground. Bright chequered sunlight fell on the chaffering swarm of people, and on the heaped wares amongst which they moved. Two caravans, each of some fifty camels, entirely laden with salt, arrived. These had come from the Red Sea coast, following the route through the *Aussa*. I define Lower, or Southern, *Danakil*, as the country which lies to the south of this caravan road, as far as *Wara Malka* and the railway; and Upper, or Northern, *Danakil*, as the country lying north

of it, as far as the track which connects Adua with the Red Sea.

The salt that came to the market had been transported on the backs of camels all the way from the deposits on the coast of French Somaliland. It was stony and full of small holes, resembling petrified sponge. It was carried in long cylinders of woven palm leaves, about three feet long by six inches in diameter. Since it has to be carried from such a great distance, it is not surprising that salt is a very valuable commodity on the Plateau. The further one goes into the interior the more costly one finds it, and in some places it is used as currency, in place of money.

In the afternoon, the market came to an end, and all the people returned to their villages in the hills. The men of the caravans loaded the salt they had not disposed of, and moved away in the direction of some other market. At sunset the place, where noise and excitement had been current all day, was as silent as the grave.

During our stay at this place, we hired, at high wages, four Danakils and two Abyssinians. The latter were called Johannes and Mordofa. We anticipated that the Danakils would be extremely useful, for they were well acquainted with the country between the Plateau and the Aussan Sultanate. I was particularly struck with the intelligence of one of them, a man named Koko.

We exchanged some of our weakened camels for fresh ones, and also purchased three additional animals. We wrote letters, which we delivered into the hand of a caravaner who was going to Dessie, where he would post them. Not one of these ever reached its destination, as we learnt a few months later.

We desired to get rid of Joseph before leaving, for he had grown unbearable, and was not always a willing helper. We also thought of leaving behind us Osman, the slave who had joined us at Awash Station. He was nearly always ill, and we could scarcely afford to drag such a man along with us in the places we proposed to visit. Another whom we desired to be



A SALT CARAVAN AT ERIFIBLE. EUPHORBIA CANDELABRA
IN THE BACKGROUND

rid of was Wolde Georghis, whose presence with us was resented by all the other men as bringing bad luck to the expedition. We handed over Georghis to a Galla mule-caravaner, who was going to the big market-places on the Plateau, and would eventually deliver him to another caravan, travelling in the direction of Addis Ababa. In any event, as soon as Georghis reached any place on the main caravan route of the Plateau, he would find plenty of opportunities to work his way to the capital, and even save part of his wages in the process.

Joseph and Osman fell on their knees and begged us not to send them away, and at last we agreed to keep them.

The market-day was to be our last at Erifible, for we proposed to leave early on the morrow. That night the hyenas were more numerous than ever, as they gathered to fall on the refuse that had been left in the market-place. The disgusting beasts kept running round our camp as though they were on patrol duty, and their lugubrious laughter sounded through the great amphitheatre, and echoed in the ravines to the west. Other yells sounded from afar, and the near and distant sounds of this ghouls'-mirth, added to the sight of the shadowy forms, which passed trotting and trotting round our camp, caused a feeling of uneasiness in one's mind. For the low nature of that vermin is most hateful, and here particularly, seeing them flitting in the uncertain light of a weak moon, they seemed strangely horrid and loathsome. Our camels and mules were tethered very close together, and under our observation, for hyenas will spring at the haunches of living animals, and tear off pieces of their flesh. We managed to sleep fairly well, notwithstanding the restlessness of our animals. The poor beasts were scared by the vermin, which laughed and yelled, and circled incessantly about the camp, often coming quite close to them.

We left at an early hour in the morning, retracing our steps under the acacias and euphorbias. We came to the Ija, but did not halt there, and on coming near to the village of Ga-

baro, we left the track by which we had climbed into the mountains, and turned to the north-east. Presently, we halted amongst some trees in what seemed a fair place, but when I had settled myself under one of the trees I found that I was becoming covered with ticks. Myriads of them were crawling on my breeches, and some had already penetrated my clothing, and reached my skin. I jumped up, and tried to free myself from these pests, but I was obliged to change my clothing before I could get rid of them. Pastori and Rosina were in the same plight. Afterwards, we chose another tree, under which no cattle appeared to have rested, for it is the cattle which drop these ticks on the ground.

As we wore boots, we were free at least from wriggle-worms, whereas our men, who went barefoot or in sandals, suffered much from these parasites. They burrow deep under the skin, and must be extracted with a knife-point. It is sometimes an exceedingly painful operation, yet it was as common with our men as cutting the nails was with us.

The mules were walking hives of horse-flies. If a man passed his hand under a mule's belly, the noise made by the disturbed horse-flies was like that of a myriad of swarming bees. This used to make my blood boil, yet I could not free the unfortunate mules of their torment. All the flies within a wide compass would congregate upon them, and one of their number, the weakest mule of them all, was more tortured than any, as he would do nothing to drive the insects away. He would neither flick them with his tail, nor swing his head round at them. He had no strength to spare for such exertions. At the first stop, red in the face with rage, I, with the help of some of the men, would kill and kill horse-flies, in a hopeless attempt to give some relief to our poor mules. Hardly a single fly settled on the camels. I tried rubbing kerosene on the parts where the mules were most subject to their attack, but it had no effect. I smeared the animals with mud, which caked hard, but even that failed. For the flies left the mules, and settled on the camels until the mud had crumbled and

dropped off the former, when they returned to their favourites in greater numbers than ever. I passed bundles of lighted straw under their bellies, and knowing what I was trying to do, the mules stood still and docile. But although I singed the wings of a few hundred flies, it was of little consequence, for the vast bulk of them crawled and flew on the animals' heads, or retired for a brief spell to the nearest camel. It was impossible for our mules to put on flesh, or even keep in good condition, while they were victimized by these parasites. Their blood was sucked from them day and night. In the lowlands, I had nearly freed the poor beasts from flies, as the insects can scarcely live in desert country. But as soon as we came on the Plateau they were covered with them again.

We had agreed to continue our journey in the afternoon, but we were prevented by heavy rain. A fierce wind had begun to blow, and it was only with great difficulty, and after we had become wet through, that we succeeded in pitching our tent. There we spent the night.

On the morrow we resumed our journey, and descended amongst rocks until we came to a dry torrent called Ereidera. It contained some very good water-holes, and, after having passed to the opposite side, we camped on its bank. On the way, we had encountered some ariels, but they had not come within rifle range. We shot some guinea-fowl.

Again, heavy weather forced us to remain where we were for the night, and, in order to make some use of our enforced leisure, I called Abulker, the old one-eyed servant who had made such a remarkable recovery from his sickness in the Awash valley, and with his assistance proceeded to kill the worms which had embedded themselves in the inside of our mules' lower lips. I had noticed that when they took a mouthful of grass, even though it was free from thorns, they twisted their lips as though they had been stung. They ate very little, and the act of mastication seemed painful to them. The cause of all this was the worms which had penetrated into their lips. I now ordered one of the men to bring some lighted brands

from the camp fire, and we made a second fire for our surgery. Makonnen held and stroked the mules to keep them quiet, though as soon as they realized that they were to have medical treatment the animals stood quiet, with a knowing air, one ear moving round to catch our remarks. Abulker, since his recovery at Unte, had taken a delight in acting as doctor or veterinary surgeon to all, and he was jealous of anybody else being employed in such work. He now produced some curved flat irons, about the size of the palm of one's hand, which are used to cauterize festering wounds. These we heated in the fire till they were red hot. We then turned the under-lip of the mule inside out, and, with the red-hot iron, burnt the flesh and the worms inside it. The mules seemed to enjoy the treatment. We also burnt bundles of straw under their bellies, and this, too, they positively luxuriated in, for it burnt or drove away the torturing flies, and soothed the irritated skin. Before seeing this, I would never have believed that a mule would stay quiet with a burning faggot under him. With the same hot irons, we cauterized the wounds on the backs of two camels, which could not carry loads by reason of them.

On the morrow, the persistent downpour of rain prevented us from leaving as early as we wished to do, and it made us anxious with regard to the condition of the ground in parts of the Awash valley. We felt it was imperative to reach the Aussa as soon as we possibly could. As we advanced, we found that the ground had everywhere turned to mud. It was dotted with tufts of coarse grass, and here and there with acacias and mimosas. Numerous birds fluttered about; some of them were most strikingly coloured. We only caught a glimpse of the Awash valley, through the opening of the horseshoe of hills in which we were marching, for the view to the east was intercepted by other hills. Our progress was slow on the slippery soil, but it improved whenever we came to places where gravel and sand had been strewn by the torrents in a fan-shaped delta.

In the course of time we reached the northern side of the ring of hills, and began to climb the rocky slope. At last we reached the summit, and, after descending a little way on the other side, we came to a torrent-bed called Barrita, where we halted on a ledge under the vertical mountain wall. The torrent carried a considerable volume of water, and while we were there it rose and fell after every heavy downpour of rain. At one time, we feared it would overflow the ledge of rock on which we were encamped, but fortunately it remained a few inches too low.

On the next day, the torrent was still too high for us to attempt to travel downstream in its bed until we found a break in its left bank, as we desired to do. We could only wait for the flood to subside. While doing so, we made our animals ford the stream, so that they might graze amongst the bushes that grew amidst the rocks on the opposite bank. We were in this situation when, in the calm morning, a shrill rifle-shot rang and echoed in the gorge. Startled, we quickly looked round to ascertain which of our men were out of camp, watching over the grazing animals. We could see the men with the camels, but the mules had gone to the other side of the hill, and the men in charge of them were Dimsa and Makonnen, the least intelligent of our men. The recollection of Bayonna's end was still fresh in all our minds. I quickly gave an order, and three of the Christians and two of the Erifible Danakils, all armed, rushed through the stream, and with leaps and bounds soon reached the summit of the hill. The men left in camp were peering uneasily in every direction, especially at the rim of the vertical wall which towered at our shoulders — the most fitting place in that horrid ravine from which to ambush a caravan.

After half an hour of suspense, our seven men at last appeared on the hilltop, and for a few seconds stood clear against the sky. There we could count them, and our anxiety was at once relieved. They came flying and springing down from boulder to boulder, till they stood beside us in the abyss.

The explanation of the shot was that Dimsa, playing with his rifle, had accidentally let it go off, in spite of the many warnings he had received to take care that nothing of the sort should happen. He was not a vicious youth, though childish at times, but as he had considerably alarmed his friends they now gave him a good thrashing. But a more severe punishment than the beating was inflicted on him: we took away his rifle and cartridge-belt, and gave it to somebody else who had so far gone without one, for we had more men than rifles. This was a sad blow to Dimsa, for, apart from the degradation it implied, there was the additional danger of going unarmed into the country of the Danakils.

We Europeans never carried weapons, but our men would have done anything rather than be deprived of their rifles, though in most cases the weapon would probably be quite useless in an emergency, in the hands of its excitable bearer. We hoped Dimsa's punishment would serve as a warning to the remainder.

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ARRIVAL IN THE AUSSA

AFTER waiting some hours for the Barrita torrent to subside, we left the rocky ledge, and followed the watercourse down till we came to a gap in its left bank. Here we left it and commenced to climb, our object being to shorten our journey by cutting across the range.

We ascended with difficulty, for the stones rolled away under our feet, but, having attained the summit, we were fortunate enough to come to another torrent-bed which descended the opposite side, and presented a comparatively easy path for our caravan. As we crept along the bottom, between its perpendicular sides, the complete lack of living creatures besides ourselves gave a tomb-like atmosphere to the place. Not even a bird moved. Feeling uneasy in spite of ourselves, we travelled as rapidly as possible through that deathly crevice in the heart of the mountain, and no man lagged behind. It was some hours before we came to the end of the corridor, and the watercourse opened fanwise on the plain. On the slight declivity which preceded this dissipation of the stream, gravel and rock were spread with remarkable evenness. The delta was ribbed where the last threads of the torrent had run, and it here joined the Talalek, a larger watercourse. The latter came from the north-west, and issuing from a ravine to our left it meandered over the open ground to which we had

come, and was lost again round a curve in the valley to our right.

There were a few trees, and some water-holes, in the wide torrent-bed. The water, though muddy, was palatable; we filled our goatskins, as we expected to have a long and waterless march. I was attracted to inspect more closely some of the trees, the roots of which had been exposed by the current washing away the soil. They were mimosas with spreading branches, and each seemed to be set on a pedestal resembling an inverted candelabra with a hundred arms.

We resumed our march, and presently, on issuing from a small valley, beheld the Awash plain in all its boundless extent. The hillocks amongst which we stood were the last fringe of the Plateau spurs. Now, after our short respite in the limpid upland air, we were to plunge anew into the miasmas, the heat, and the fetid water of the lowland plain. After rounding one more cliff to our right, we saw in the far distance a faint sign, steady above the horizon. It was the formidable Ayelu, the same at whose base we had travelled, and that for three weeks had been the grim and silent witness of our struggles. It seemed as though it were still watching us like a living thing, unmoved; that even during our long detour in the freedom of the Plateau it had never ceased to cast over us its evil spell. Between it and us lay the winding line of the river's arboreal fringe, like an enormous serpent, the head and tail of which were hidden in the desert's haze.

Having now come to the open plain, we were able to move faster. We were following the track of caravans from French Somaliland and the Eritrean small port of Assab, through the Aussa to the Abyssinian Plateau. We passed three more salt caravans, such as we had seen at Erifible. They were miserable convoys, travelling together for the sake of mutual assistance. The camels were exhausted, the men wretchedly armed, and a few women followed, with strained eyes, in the rear. The aspect of all was eloquent of the oppression of mind and body which they had endured for at least six weeks. In a

few more days they would reach Erifible, but those forty, or perhaps sixty, days of ceaseless exertion and semi-starvation had taken the life out of the camels. The track was strewn with bleaching bones.

The salt caravans are organized by Somalis or Danakils living on the coast of the Red Sea, or the Gulf of Aden. Caravans of cotton goods and other imported articles, on the other hand, are sent into the interior by Europeans, Arabs, Levantines, and Indians, who do not accompany their goods, but entrust them to natives, on account of the danger of foreigners travelling in Danakil territory. This commerce pays fabulous tolls. First, a heavy tax is levied by the chiefs, then officials take their share, and so on, until even the menial servants of people in authority have exacted a contribution for themselves. Last of all, the rank and file of the tribes, through whose territory the road passes, constantly hold up, and sometimes completely loot and annihilate, the caravans. In the last case all the goods, animals, and arms are stolen, and if any of the caravaners should retain his life it will only be at the price of emasculation and enslavement by his captors.

For these reasons, commerce is precarious and intermittent. Little is brought down from the Plateau to the sea coast; a certain amount of grain, and a little coffee, and slaves. The trade in the last, though of necessity now very restricted, is so lucrative a business as to be worth the taking of considerable risk. An Amhara or Galla, sold on the Arabian coast, is worth a thousand thalers (£100). Women are not so valuable as men. The awful trade is very small nowadays, however; its golden period came to an end with Menelik, the last great emperor of Abyssinia. No more are long strings of chained men driven to the coast like cattle. The seaports on the African coast are all in the hands of England, Italy, and France, and the navies of those Powers are under standing orders to search every dhow, or native boat, which is suspected of carrying a slave or slaves. Though a few are still smuggled across the Red Sea to the Arabian side, the ports of Zeila, Jibuti,

and Assab have long since undergone absterion of that grim and terrible commerce. The traffic still persists, because it is lucrative, but no more than one or two slaves is found in any caravan bound for the coast, owing rather to the difficulty of delivering them in the profitable Arabian market than to the scarcity of the supply. Generally, they are boys kidnapped on the Plateau, and taken rapidly, under menace of immediate death, on the first stages from the Plateau towns. They soon find themselves already too far from their homes to escape with much advantage, even if their fear would allow them to make the attempt. When once they have reached the Danakil lowlands, they are as much concerned to keep close to their captors as though they were their best friends, for to escape there would mean to fall into the hands of the Danakils. By these human fiends they would immediately be emasculated, and, if they survived that operation, they would be enslaved and sold as personal attendants to some chief.

Prominent amongst the articles of trade are the big double-edged knives which come from the coast. Lance-points, too, come from the coast, and a few from the Plateau. For the most part, these and other articles of importation only penetrate into the interior of Danakil as the result of many successive plundering raids, when they pass from hand to hand as loot.

As has been said, one of our new Danakils was far more intelligent than any of the others, and was already proving of great value to us. This Koko questioned the men of the caravans which we met, with the shrewdness of a man of experience. He had brought his wife with him — a fat woman, not unpleasant to look at, and of a good disposition, quiet and reserved. She spoke little, and did not intrude on the conversation of men, and in the halts she painted her finger-nails red, and carefully greased her hair. Compared with most Danakil women, Koko's wife was a lady.

We stopped for the night in a deep cleft in the ground, where there was a water-hole amongst grass-tufts. A few mimosas, stripped of their foliage by the animals of the caravans

we had passed, stood forlornly scattered about the depression. The district was called Ladinigero. A large snake caused a diversion by getting amongst our baggage. It resented our efforts to be rid of it, and crawled, hissing, over the boxes. At last it vanished into a crevice in the earth.

The next morning, we directed our march towards the north-east. The Ladinigero was a maze of small clefts, erosions in the earth, into which we continually descended, and again climbed out of. Presently we sighted the isolated Askoma Hill, a prominent landmark, in the distance straight ahead. To the south, the Ayelu made a faint triangle against the sky. After four hours, we came to a watercourse, the Busidima, in which a thread of water ran. Having crossed this, we halted and encamped for the rest of the day. In the afternoon, Pastori and I shot some buck and a few birds, amongst the sparse vegetation.

On the next morning, we were about to move off when I learnt that Joseph had been indulging in insolence towards Rosina, who however proposed to disregard the matter. I disagreed with this, and we decided that at the first opportunity we would send the fellow back to the Plateau with some caravan.

All the morning we marched over broken ground, and in some places the fissures were deep and dangerous. In the course of this stage we passed two dry torrents, the Forza and the Gonna. Next we came to another torrent, also called Gonna, where we found the best water we had seen for three days. Here we halted.

It was a night of full moon, with cirrus clouds in the sky, and the light, reflected again from the white ground, was curiously strong. We had to be on our guard against the jackals, which constantly ran round our camp, for these animals are so greedy of hide that they will steal saddlery and boots. We could see them clearly in the moonlight, incessantly trotting in circles.

We left before dawn, and continued moving over the wide

eroded Jaldi plain. After four hours, we reached the Askoma Hill, which we had seen ahead of us for three days. It was volcanic, and at its base flowed a small torrent of good water, called Ledi. In the bed, and on the banks, of this brook there were peculiar lava-stones, honeycombed like sponges, as hard as glass, and of the brightest, red, green, violet, blue, and yellow. I had never seen such stones before. The hill was no more than 300 feet high, and its top was flat, but its sides rose everywhere steeply from the desolate plain. We skirted its base, and again righted our course for the north-east. The ground was better, for though still of clay, it bore a thin layer of sand on its surface, which provided a good footing for the camels. In some places there was fine gravel, containing numerous pebbles of red and green jasper. We camped near a watercourse, called Waranso, which contained some large sheets of water, for the gravelly bed was wide, and the water was held up by some obstructions. It was unusually clean, by reason of the recent rains, and we enjoyed the luxury of bathing in it. There were some wells, called Addodas, in the vicinity.

Proceeding on our way, we came to another dry torrent known as the Baddanna. We had now come close to the range of the Addaale Mountains, and were obliged to alter our course in order to skirt its eastern end. We were moving on steadily in the twilight, when suddenly an exceptionally powerful wind arose, and forced us to halt. The moon was at once entirely hidden by the clouds of sand which filled the air. It seemed impossible to proceed, for we were moving across the spurs of the Addaale, and it was likely that the ground for some miles ahead was rocky. But presently the wind abated, and the crescent moon reappeared between scudding clouds. We marched on till midnight, when we came to a considerable river, called the Mille. We forded it with difficulty, for the water was deep and rapid, and encamped on the opposite bank, amongst some of those round massive bushes the circular leaves of which are so much liked

by camels. Our poor mules, however, went supperless, as so often happened.

When morning dawned, we found that the Mille was fifty feet wide. It was swollen by the recent rains, and it was evident that we were only just in time to pass it, for the marks on the banks clearly indicated that as the season advanced it would further enlarge itself, to a degree that would prohibit the passage of camels. The Mille is probably the only real river which joins the Awash. All the rest are merely seasonal torrents, dry during the summer, and at most other times, except immediately after rain has fallen.

Seeing numbers of guinea-fowl about, I took my gun, and with a single shot, killed one bird and wounded another. The wounded one ran behind a bush, and, accompanied by Dimsa, I was going to pick it up, when from the opposite side of the bush a jackal ran out, with my bird in his mouth. We both laughed at this outcome, and Dimsa hastened to throw stones at the animal to make him drop his loot, but without success.

Tufts of grass began to appear, and occasionally we passed a tamarisk — signs that we were approaching the Awash. Later we met a large caravan, and we noticed then that these native travellers were as anxious as we ourselves were to pass to the further side of a torrent before they encamped, for fear lest the water should rise in the time they remained there. For this caravan had passed the night beside a stream, which we eventually reached, and where we found the remains of their encampment. We crossed over and proceeded some little distance before halting for the night.

On the morrow we proceeded towards our landmark, the Faro Hill, an isolated cone. We were obliged to abandon another camel on the road, as it could go no further. We reached and passed the Faro Hill, and came to a torrent of the same name, which eventually joined another called Arsis. The latter was a tributary of the Awash. Both were dry. In one place we travelled over ground covered with gravel almost as spheri-

cal as marbles. The action of water had so worn them, exposing different layers, that many of them resembled eyes.

We stopped amidst sparse vegetation, on the bank of the Arsis. In the afternoon, I climbed with Pastori to the top of a basalt hill, which appeared to be simply a huge heap of volcanic boulders, lying as though piled up by human agency. From this vantage-point, I made sketches of the surrounding country. Frightened by our presence, and the noise we made, some marmots and squirrels rushed away from their hiding-places as we approached. We noticed several look-out redoubts for sentinels, and some cavities surrounded by a ring of large stones. These pits were to conceal parties of robbers, so that they might suddenly fall upon caravans passing by on the plain below. From such observatories signals had doubtless often been made to parties of men at the other end of the pass, which resulted in the overpowering of an unsuspecting caravan which had come between the two.

From the hill, I could see that the Awash was not far from us, to the east. It ran at the foot of some very steep hills, forming part of the isolated Hallu chain. To the north were the Tandoho hills, which approach close to the Hallu, leaving only a narrow ravine for the passage of the Awash. Further to the north was the Kurub plain.

We decided to remain in our camp the next day, for the water and pasture were good. We sent Joseph back, accompanied by one of our Danakils of Erifible. The latter was to deliver Joseph to the leader of a caravan, an Arab whom we had met when we passed his caravan, and with whom we had then arranged that after a few days we would send Joseph back to him. The Arab was to take him with him to the Plateau. Our Danakil would very soon overtake us again on his return, for they can travel on foot much faster than a camel-caravan moves.

In the late afternoon, we had given orders to load when Makonnen came and told us that all the mules had run away from him. Makonnen had always been a simpleton, and un-

reliable. We now had to postpone our departure. Pastori soon found the tracks of the animals, and set the Danakils on their trail. After a search lasting four hours, two of our Danakils came back at sunset with the three animals. We had been obliged to send the Danakils, for our Plateau men were afraid to go far from our camp or caravan. They were prepared to go anywhere with us, but it was useless to order them to go anywhere independently. They had not forgotten how Bayonna met his end.

As we had now decided to remain in our camp at the Arsis until the morrow, we sent Koko ahead with instructions to present himself before the Aussan Sultan, and to inform him that we were about to enter his territory, that our intentions were peaceful, and that we hoped to meet him, and to be permitted to buy camels and millet before proceeding to the northward. We felt positively sure that the news of our approach must have reached the Sultan, but it would be more proper, out of respect to his position, to send him a messenger of our own.

The Aussan Sultan is the greatest of the rulers of Danakil. In his territories are to be found the only cultivated lands in the country, a sure sign that we might expect to see there a more advanced degree of civilization than we had yet seen in the Awash valley. The greater part of the Aussan Sultanate is, of course, desert, but where the Awash begins to lose itself in the sands, it bifurcates, and forms with each branch a series of small lakes. From these, its waters spread out in the rainy season, and eventually are evaporated, or absorbed by the earth, and so entirely disappear. The river carries a great deal of mud, which it distributes over the land at its mouth or delta, and it is in this district that cultivation is practised. The quantity of millet produced, and the number of cattle raised, may be trivial by comparison with those obtained in an equal area of more fortunate countries, but they are sufficient to make the Aussa famous for its richness throughout the length and breadth of this primitive country. A legend of

enormous wealth is attached to the Aussa, as if it were a land bursting with fatness, and milk and honey flowed in its brooks. So it is spoken of on the Plateau, and on the barren Eritrean coast. For our part, although we were far from expecting to find the Aussa a marvel of fertility and wealth, yet we were greatly attracted to see it, not only on account of the legends which were told of it, but because it represented the halfway point of our long journey. Here we wanted to prepare our caravan for the second, and out of all proportion the more difficult, part of our enterprise — the journey into Upper Danakil, a country from which no European had yet returned alive.

On the morrow we were on the march very early, as we desired to make up for some of the delay which had occurred by reason of the loss of the mules. We kept on between basalt outcrops for five hours, keeping the Tandoho mountains on our left. On one hill we saw the Sultans first fortified outpost, a little to the west of the Awash. Presently, we halted in the fringe of the forest belt of the great river. Wolde Jesus, who was a clever fisher, caught in the brown waters, in less than an hour, more fine barbels than could be eaten by the whole caravan. Every day had been hotter than the last, and now right up till sunset the heat was torturing.

Next day, soon after leaving Tandoho, we found that the volcanic rocks gave place to sandstone, which rose in abrupt banks all over the level country. From here we looked down on the Kurub desert, into which the broken sandstone country merged by a series of gigantic steps. If a race such as the Ancient Egyptians had inhabited these parts, they could scarcely have failed to hew and chisel these masses of rock into temples and sphinxes. This is the northernmost point reached by the Awash, which here turns to a mainly easterly direction.

The general course of the Awash is NNE., for a distance of more than two hundred miles as the crow flies. Only when it reaches the southern edge of the Kurub desert does it turn

As we advanced, the Kurub desert shimmered around us in its deadly glistening whiteness. I felt we had come to the border of a grim zone now. The atmosphere was stifling, for the heat came in waves, and seemed to take us chokingly by the throat. We instinctively kept close to the grey fringe of the forest on our right, as though recoiling in dismay from that terrible desert. We marched forward as long as we were able, but at last we were obliged to take refuge amongst the trees, and refresh ourselves in the shadow of the tasselled tamarisks. In the evening, we fished, and poured bucketfuls of water over ourselves. The name of the place was Udduddaito.

We departed before dawn, by the light of the moon. The white ground in the moonlight, with black shadows of the trees painted on it, was a wonderful sight. We came to the open desert, and cutting straight across the river's minor curves, we at last found ourselves at the place where it takes a great bend towards the south-east. Its nearer bank was vertical here, a hundred feet high, and in some parts was deeply under-cut. The opposite bank sloped gently up from the water-level, and doubtless formed the bed of a lake when the river was swollen by the rains. Beyond the bare shore, there was a dense thicket, then a belt of small trees, and finally the towering mass of the true forest. As the sun rose, and threw more and more heat on the earth, sheets of false mirage-water appeared glimmering in the desert ahead of us. After more marching we came amongst scattered bushes, and from one of these there came a female jackal with several little ones. Our men caught one of the puppies, which was of a pretty silvery colour. I carried the little animal with its muzzle hidden in the crook of my arm.

When the sun became unbearably hot, we turned towards the forest, but we could not immediately get into it, for a thick strewage of dead thorn-branches lay on the ground. After much difficulty, we managed to reach the bank of the river, where we found a little green vegetation amongst the thorns. We chose a place which seemed less encumbered with

spirit to go further in the awful heat. Little spaces were also cleared for the camels to couch, and be relieved of their burdens. Another of the animals had been abandoned on the road that morning. The remainder were pitiful to look at, and our men were in a bad plight, too. In the afternoon the thermometer rose still more. Not a breath of air stirred in the half dead forest, where a few living trees struggled out of the dead thorns. Everything was drooping and lifeless in that terrible heat, and we breathed with difficulty in the stagnant air.

Several days had now passed since we last saw natives, and even these had been caravaners, not true natives. The complete absence of Danakils, though it might be accounted for by the harshness of the conditions prevailing in this desolate district, was not reassuring. We feared unseen enemies.

In order to avoid the smiting sunshine, seeing that the temperature increased with every passing day, we decided to march at night with the help of the moon.

We were so anxious to treat our jackal puppy gently, that we lost it here, through not tying it up securely. Both Rosina and I were filled with regrets, for we had grown much attached to the little creature.

The place of our encampment was called Awa.

THE SULTAN'S MINISTER

WE crept out of the chaos of thorns and fallen branches before dawn, in order to march as far as possible before the sun's heat became unbearable. We Europeans could stand it fairly well, but our Plateau men, accustomed to living at an altitude of ten thousand feet, suffered severely in these breathless lowlands. They moved without energy, and in spite of the rags which they swathed about their heads and necks as a protection from the direct rays of the sun, they drooped and shambled along with evident effort.

We did not load water, as we intended to keep in contact with the Awash. We merely filled all our water-bottles, but, in taking a short cut along the arc of a bend in the Awash, we exhausted our water long before we again saw the river. At last, after four very heavy hours, we descried in the distance again the arboreal fringe, showing as a black mark between the yellow sky and the dazzling white earth. The air danced about us, and seemed to be full of living incandescent hairs, that rose and descended and fought together, like bacteria seen in motion under a microscope. The thermometer showed 151° F.

Another camel had to be left behind. Settie hoped that it might recover in time to rejoin us, for we expected to spend a few days in resting in the Aussa. He therefore left two armed men with it, giving them instructions to bring it along after

us, if it showed signs of being able to rise to its feet again.

A further two and a half hours was occupied in reaching the belt of trees. In the meantime, Pastori and I left the caravan, and proceeded directly to the Awash, at a place which we could see was barren of vegetation. The gap in the forest was so extensive that we could not tell where the trees recommenced. We found a ford across the river, and under the broken bank which sloped to the water there were several goats. Then we saw their herdsmen, who, though they must have watched us approaching the river across the open plain, had remained close under the bank, and betrayed no inclination to come near us. This diffidence is very common amongst such people: it is as though they wished to avoid offending, even with a look. However, they soon gained confidence, and came to exchange news with the two men who were with us. When contact had thus been established, four or five more Aussans appeared on the opposite bank, and proceeded to swim across. This was the first time I had seen natives swimming in Danakil. It appeared that the stream was now too high to be crossed by fording. The Aussans whipped the water furiously with long poles, yelling loudly the while, in order to frighten away the crocodiles. Then they quickly threw the poles on the bank, and took to the water, swimming energetically with much yelling, kicking and splashing. They swam rapidly, and soon landed on our side of the river, where I noticed there was a collection of poles for the use of those who wished to cross in the opposite direction.

The caravan was still some distance away, for it travelled slowly under the scorching sun. We remained waiting for it to rejoin us. While in this position, we caught sight of a small group of men coming towards us from downstream. It was Koko, returning with some hangers-on from his mission to the Anfari, or Sultan of the Aussa. On coming up with us, he told us that at first the Sultan had appeared somewhat worried to hear of our presence in his territory. He had considered whether we should not be stopped at Tandoho or Uuddud-daito, or some other place on the edge of the Kurub desert.

He had appeared to disapprove of our camping close to the river, saying that Farangis are too fond of writing down all they see in books. Koko had answered stoutly, and said that we were peaceful men without ulterior motives, that we had already come a long way, and proposed to travel a long way yet, and that the Aussa was not our main objective, but merely one of a number of places which we had planned to visit. The good Danakil had further suggested to the Sultan that it would suit our convenience better if he would be good enough to sanction our proceeding down the river as far as Gallifaghe, instead of remaining on the edge of the desert. We should there be near the Sultan's place of residence, and should thus be better able to seek his advice as to our route, when the time came for us to prosecute our journey. To these suggestions His Highness had assented.

We were highly interested to hear this report, and to learn that the Sultan did not regard us with hostility, or propose to hinder us. We complimented Koko on his able handling of the mission we had entrusted to him.

Our worthy henchman now pointed out to us with his lance the place which had been assigned to us as a camping ground. The caravan had not yet reached us, so we were able to divert it towards Gallifaghe, the appointed place. This was half a mile upstream of where we were standing, and was the point at which the forest came to an end. When at last we halted, an hour after noon, we had been marching continuously for seven hours in the burning sunshine. We found ourselves amongst large scattered trees, and on the river bank there was good grass. We lost no time in raising our tent, for the shadow of the trees was insufficient to protect us effectively from that all-penetrating sun.

In the late afternoon we noticed a party of horsemen approaching from the south: they rode as straight as an arrow towards us. When they came closer, we saw that there were two men riding together in front. These were followed by a dozen more, riding in a close group, and behind these again

All arrived at the trot. The riders dismounted under a large mimosa, whither Abdul Kader and Koko proceeded, in order to meet them. We were given to understand that these were emissaries of the Sultan, who had been sent to return the visit of our messenger to the Sultan's court. Their real purpose proved to be to keep us under observation. The two principal personages were unarmed, but their attendant horsemen had rifles, and of the footmen some had rifles and others lances. The horses were small, light, and nervous. They were equipped with Arabian saddles, badly made; but those of the two chiefs were elaborately caparisoned with tassels, strips of leather, and coloured cloths.

The elders now approached us on foot, attended by two boys, each of whom carried slung on his naked shoulders a cotton cloth bag. The horsemen left their animals in charge of the foot-soldiers, and advanced behind their chiefs at a little distance. On coming near our tent, the chiefs began to bow low at every step, and we walked towards them with outstretched hands. We exchanged low words of greeting and smiles with one another, words which, though neither side understood the other, were clearly polite inquiries and good wishes.

Friendly contact having thus been established, the two envoys seated themselves with us on some boxes, which had been arranged in a circle before our tent. One of our visitors was extremely thin and bony, having enormous eye sockets, and the thinnest of lips. He was some fifty years of age. He wore a cotton loin-cloth, and a long waistcoat without buttons, from the armholes of which issued long thin arms, ending in slender long-fingered hands. When mounted he had worn sandals, but he slipped these off his feet when he came into our presence. The usual curved Danakil knife rested in a sheath worn horizontally at his side. This man was the Sultan's secretary, one of the few men in the country who could read and write Arabic. He had also learnt a few words of French, which he enjoyed repeating when our intercourse became less formal.

He invariably carried a Koran with him, in a white cotton bag tied with a strip of the same material. His companion, who spoke little, appeared to be his secretary.

The two boys were their pages. One of them carried in his bag a roll of much crumpled paper, a horn inkpot, two quills, a small cloth, some string, and his master's Koran. In the bag of the other there was only some cotton stuff, probably a spare loin-cloth.

We ordered coffee to be prepared for the envoys and their escort, and the latter, on seeing that their masters had been amicably received, began to fraternize with such of our men as spoke the Danakil tongue. Among the latter were the two Massowa Danakils, Abulker and Abdulla, men who had travelled a great deal between Massowa and the Plateau, and whose conversation was always of interest. Our Danakils of Erifible also had strange things of distant lands to tell the soldiers, and several circles of hearty gossipers were formed. Only our Plateau men circled round, suspicious and self-conscious. But these would turn, smiling eagerly, if some caravan comrade invited them to rub hands with the newly arrived Aussans — actual inhabitants of that mysterious half-fabulous Aussa. These Abyssinians were anxious to display before the An-fari's men their sense of duty and discipline, so as to bear out the inference which was to be drawn from the fact of their belonging to such a caravan as ours: namely, that they were men of some note in their own country. As the only representatives of their race in these parts, they were also concerned to display their good manners and breeding.

While the groups of men were drinking coffee together, clusters of the local natives gathered at a little distance to watch, each man leaning on his lance, round the shaft of which one leg was twisted. Some few had squatted on their haunches, and moved their heads to this side and that, in order to obtain a better sight of some detail of our camp.

The two suave envoys said many pleasant things, repeatedly assuring us of the Sultan's happiness at our arrival in his

dominions, and as each remark was translated by the interpreter, they smiled and bowed again and again. Next they inquired of us as to our plans, where we wanted to go and why. We replied that we should like to have the honour of personally meeting the Sultan's ' Presence,' and to be allowed to purchase camels and millet in the Aussa. We also announced our intention of sending a letter to His Highness, thanking him for his munificent gift of five large bullocks. The secretary was obviously glad to hear about this letter. Doubtless, the ability to produce such a work showed him plainly that we were no mean men. When we went on to hint that five large bullocks were rather more than we could manage to eat, he said that a great ruler could not make small gifts, as it was needless for him to point out to such enlightened personages as we were, but that if five bullocks really were more than we could eat, then he would only be too delighted to oblige us by keeping three of them himself. We replied that he was evidently a very great statesman, and that we should feel highly honoured to take advantage of his suggestion. An hour was passed in this pleasant manner, and then Pastori and I went to the river to take a shower-bath.

We were very relieved to find ourselves in a place where there was plenty of good grass for our mules. There were many birds in the forest, particularly guinea-fowl. Hawks circled overhead, and high above them great vultures floated. At evening, flights of marabouts winged their way laboriously hither and thither. The concentration of so many people and animals in one spot had attracted the rapacious and unclean birds. As they sailed in spirals overhead, or sat on the branches of some tall tree, they watched with straining eyes for the anticipated appearance of refuse and offal.

At the close of our conversation, the Sultan's secretary took a striped blanket, which he had carried under his saddle, and spread it on the ground as a prayer-mat. He then began to pray in the mournful tones of the Muslims, and recited verses from the Koran, showing much compunction and devotion.

Two only of his retinue stood shoulder to shoulder behind him to repeat the responses, and imitate the genuflections of their imam. At the conclusion of prayers, the two soldiers retired, and the secretary, having spread a few of our large sacks under a tree, seated himself cross-legged on them, and proceeded to chant further passages from the Koran. His lean elbow rested elegantly on his ornamented saddle, the hand holding the sacred book with reverence. The old man made a picture of dignity and mild correctness of manners. When night came he would, with the beautiful simplicity which their religion inculcates, use his saddle as a pillow and the sacks as a mattress, sinking to rest on them with a murmured invocation of 'In the Name of Allah.'

In the evening, a substantial meal was prepared for everybody. Then it occurred to me to wonder what had happened to the two men who had been left in the open desert with our enfeebled camel. Neither they nor the camel had yet come in. Without delay, we sent Koko with some millet flour and a good skin of water for those two fellows, who must have been suffering the pains of thirst these many hours. Having done this we retired to rest. We slept badly, for there were clouds of mosquitoes in the forest, and the strong wind coming from the desert brought with it a thick fog of fine dust, which rendered breathing difficult. Worse even than these afflictions, however, was the noise made by our people and the Aussan soldiers, as they sat chattering together round the fires.

In these circumstances, we naturally rose early in the morning: indeed, the camp was in a bustle before daylight. We wrote our letter, in French, to the Sultan, asking his permission to buy camels and millet, and informing him of our desire to proceed to the north. Neither the Presence, his ministers, nor anybody else in the realm, was capable of reading French or any other European language, but to write him a letter with one's own hand was the polite and respectful thing to do. The contents of the letter were of no importance, for the messenger who was to deliver it, the lesser of the two

officials, was instructed to explain everything by word of mouth. In addition to this, the chief secretary was writing a report in Arabic, the court language, which explained all once more. We also added to the diplomatic post-bag a few of our private papers, for we felt sure that His Highness would demand to see our 'papers.' We possessed none of any importance, but we sent some letters which had been issued to us for travelling on the Plateau. The courier left, accompanied by two mounted soldiers.

At sunrise, Koko returned with the two men who had remained with the camel. The beast had succumbed to exhaustion, in token whereof they had cut off its tail, which they now presented to me. The poor fellows were in a pitiful state themselves, for they had been out on the burning desert all the previous day, until long after dark, without food or water. They said they had agreed with one another to remain beside the camel until it died, or was fit to move forward with them. We were much impressed by this example of loyalty and fortitude.

Of the two royal bullocks which we had kept, we now gave one to the Muslims, and the other to the Copts, in order that the followers of each creed might butcher its own meat in its own way, and eat to satiety. Koko, who had by now become an important man amongst his fellows, directed the slaughter of the Muslims' beast, a beautiful animal with a black and white coat. With a single sliding stroke, he hamstringed one of its hind legs. Immediately half a dozen men threw themselves upon the beast and bore it to the ground, just as Koko, with a swift repetition of the same stroke, cut the tendon of the other hind leg. The beast fell with a thud, Koko cut its throat, and the spouting blood flooded a space of grass. Within half an hour the carcass was skinned and quartered. As soon as the men had retired with the meat, vultures, hawks, and marabouts descended in a swarm upon the offal, and fought furiously amongst themselves for portions of it. The surplus meat which was not needed that day was

cut into strips by Copts and Muslims, and dried in the sun: thus it was preserved for some future day. However, they appeared still unsatisfied with what they had eaten, for the Muslim and the Coptic party each purchased from the natives two goats, which they promptly slaughtered and ate. The voracity of all astonished us, though we had grown somewhat accustomed to it. From living for days on the sparsest diet, a handful of millet grains or flour, the natives of these countries will pass to days of excessive gluttony, when meat comes within their reach. Nothing then seems to satiate them: meat cooked with pepper on iron pans, meat roasted on hot stones, and meat eaten raw, so as not to lose time while the other is cooking: all are consumed with equal greed.

In the afternoon, there arrived three camels laden with foodstuffs, the Sultan's daily present to us. His Highness also sent a message by the man in charge of the gifts, to say that we might move further into the interior of the Aussa, and that he would receive us at an early date. The three camels were made to kneel before us, in order that we might see well what they carried. One of them was laden with two large goatskins full of melted butter, the second carried millet flour, and the third carried three sorts of millet bread — a very fine one for ourselves and the secretary, and the other two for our various followers. There was sufficient for fifty people, though this represented a single day's supply.

We were glad to leave Gallifaghe, in accordance with the permission granted by the Sultan, for the ground about our camp was in a disgusting state, owing to the remains of slaughtered animals which lay everywhere. The accumulation of rotting refuse had been contributed to by the concourse of natives, who had gathered to our camp from every side. By day, the carrion birds floated through the tainted air, or fought together on the ground about us, without cease; and at night, hyenas and jackals contended with dogs, raising such a pandemonium of yelling, howling, and barking as rendered sleep utterly impossible.

The next morning we loaded early, and moved away. We first crossed the remainder of the desert plain, and then came amongst low volcanic hills, where the hot air was stagnant and lifeless. The burning noon came, and we were still crawling grimly amongst those interminable hills. This was the second time we had been caught on the march by the torrid noonday sun.

At last, after four hours, we came to the river again. The Secretary wished us to camp in the forest, at some distance from the stream, but we insisted on settling ourselves near the bank. He seemed to be obsessed by the fear that we should see too much of the country for its good. We carefully explained to him that his apprehension was entirely without foundation, and finally we halted in a little hippopotamus's meadow, which was closed on three sides by the jungle, and on the fourth opened to the river. A similar meadow, a little further back, was allotted to our men. The locality was called Aroberifaghe. We had reached it with five of our men ill with fever, and all the rest of them sick with over-eating.

In walking about our meadow, we had to exercise great care so as not to fall into any of the many small pits, which were completely concealed by the thick grass. Some of these hollows were eighteen inches in diameter, and knee-deep. They had been made by the hippopotami, walking about the place in the flood season, when the ground was soft.

We supposed that we should have to wait some days before being received by the Sultan, and in the meantime we decided to refrain from writing in our notebooks, except at such times as we were not under observation by any of the natives. The people seemed to be constantly on the watch to detect instances of our activity in 'putting their country on paper.' It would have been hard to convince them that jealousy in regard to such a country as theirs was very misplaced. Only a very small proportion of the great Aussan territories is capable of being cultivated, though it is true that a considerably larger proportion could be made productive. At present, agri-

culture is practised only sufficiently to supply the needs of the population, and a certain reserve crop, which is stored in the Sultan's granaries for use in the less productive years. In a country situated between territories whose feckless inhabitants, the Danakils, make no effort to relieve their indigence and misery, except by committing crime, this foresight strikes one as being highly remarkable.

The Aussans have no cause to fear the Danakils to the south, or those to the north. Both are races of miserable nomads, divided in famished clans, and further weakened by the continual raiding which drains away all their energies. They are despised accordingly. The Aussa is comparatively well supplied with firearms, is rich in camels, and is one of the few districts in these parts where horses are able to live and breed. There is a good supply of cattle, and the population is well fed. Firearms are easily procured from the Red Sea coast.

Nor can the Plateau Abyssinians menace the Aussa, for they are so far away that they could not reach it, save with untold fatigue and losses. Whether they crossed the desert or followed the river, they would meet with equal difficulties of hostile climate, hostile tribes, and lack of food. For these reasons, the Abyssinian government recognizes the independence of the Aussan Sultan, who, in any case, would almost certainly be fully capable of defending his independence, even if an army, or mob, of the Plateau soldiery were to arrive on his frontier.

The sole tie existing between the two States is the artful, or foolish, council chamber convention by which the Aussa falls within the boundary of the Ethiopian Empire. So it is marked on maps, things of the existence of which the Aussans are sublimely ignorant. It may be that the more thoughtful of the Aussans, if they know of this connection, see in it some slight protection against the all-devouring greed of the European Powers; but they give no sign that they are in fact aware of it. One thing is quite certain, and that is that every

man, from the Sultan to the least of the herdsmen, fears the covetousness of the Farangi nations. Those great crusaders of progress may or may not be interested to know that it is the fear of finding his country stolen by them which makes the Aussan study to conceal its possibilities, and not to develop it more than is necessary to supply his simplest needs.

There exists in the Aussa a primitive system of irrigation. It was constructed by Arabs, who were brought into the country for the purpose some generations ago by one of the Sultans. This could be largely extended, but at present agriculture is developed only to a sufficient extent for supplying the bare needs of the population. There are thousands of head of cattle and goats, many camels, and some horses; but, as in the case of agriculture, so with stock-raising, efficiency and maximum production are not sought. The golden rule is to avoid the risk of being robbed, by not getting rich.

Among the Aussans there are distinct signs of order and civilization, foundations ready laid for a super-structure of progress. But they prefer to remain where they are, and not to attempt another step in the mounting scale, for fear their presumption should reveal the possibilities of their country, and thus bring about their own enslavement. I reiterate this point because I was so favourably impressed by the difference between the Aussa and the territories which adjoin it on either hand.

In such Danakil territories, a handful of millet represents luxury. The people do not even know how to make bread of it. They peck it up with their fingers, a grain at a time, like birds eating, or at best roast the grains on a heated stone. To these people a shipload of millet, which in Europe would not be considered good enough to feed barnyard fowls, would represent undreamed-of wealth. A handful of the coarse grain is enough to feed a man for twenty-four hours. The cultivation of the earth is unknown. It is as though these people, although they must have heard how millet is raised by man's art, possessed no hands. In reality, what they lack is not hands,

but imagination. They are nearly as unspeculative as dumb animals. It is therefore not surprising that, among them, tales of the Aussa are tales of wonder. To the Danakil, the great oasis, indeed, is an earthly Paradise, richly stored with every luxury which their poor wits can conceive; and the Aussans are a race of great and clever men, skilled in warfare — the only art known to these most pathetic of savages. Even to us it was a great comfort to come to the Aussan oasis, after having seen so much of the grim desert and its feckless inhabitants.

The Sultan of the Aussa is a complete despot. He owns the country and everything in it, including the people. The latter enjoy an easy life. Their only real toil is in keeping the tilled lands free from the encroaching jungle vegetation, and to sow and reap the millet. Periodically, the Ruler's agents take what they need of the produce for the government and the soldiery.

While at Aroberifaghe we examined every detail of our equipment, and repaired or replaced whatever was deficient. Fresh camels, new goatskins, and a supply of millet, were purchased, and added to our depleted resources. Every evening, the Sultan's gift of bread, melted butter, and milk arrived on camels. Our men were in a state of chronic satiety, and we were obliged to throw bucketfuls of milk into the river, in order to make room for the fresh supplies. The Sultan's secretary remained in our camp, chatting, dozing, or saying his prayers.

We frequently went out to shoot, having found good places in which to lie concealed in order to wait for the approach of hippopotami and other animals. We killed a number of crocodiles, which were numerous in the river, and also many boars and buck. Wolde Jesus fished from the stream every day beautiful barbel, most of which were returned to the water, as we had an abundance of meat.

We constituted a great attraction to the natives, who came in large numbers to look at us. Many remained in the vicinity of our camp, in order to be on the spot when the Sultan should arrive. We were obliged to rig a rope fence round our

camp, in order to keep the gaping crowd at a reasonable distance. We were closely watched in everything we did, like rare exhibits. Everywhere in the forest about us there was a noise of feasting and merry-making, and the procession of newcomers seemed as though it would never end. Girls used to come and bathe in the river, below the bank where our camp was situated; and one day one of them was caught by a crocodile, and disappeared instantly. On that day, in order to frighten away the great reptiles, we killed several of them, and it so happened that a female, which we shot through the eye, threw on the bank with a blow of its tail some little freshly hatched crocodiles, no larger than lizards. We often saw schools of these little creatures in the edge of the water. I caught one of them, and placed it in an empty tin with some water.

At night the forest resounded with the laughter of hyenas, the shrieks of monkeys frightened by leopards or snakes, and the heavy blowing and snorting of hippopotami. These and other sounds combined to form a dreadful clamour, which often disturbed our slumbers. Often, when aroused from sleep, I would remain listening, ill at ease, to the sounds of the wild creatures, fighting and preying amongst the thickets and trees, on the banks of the river, or in the water. One night there was a continuous and dreadful agitation in the forest on the opposite bank of the Awash. The smaller animals screamed, in their terror, from one end of the thick woods to the other, as they ran wildly up and down, passing close in front of our camp. The forest awoke more fully all around us, and became filled with desperate cries. From the river below came a roaring and splashing and thudding of fighting crocodiles, punctuated at intervals by the wailing scream of the vanquished. Above all other sounds was that of the awful blows delivered by the hippopotami. For a moment the medley of noises was subdued beneath a huge crackling of branches, as of an enormous lorry being driven through the forest. It was a hippopotamus, coming near in search of pas-

ture. But he turned away, and the shattering echoes faded in the distance. Then the laughter of hyenas, and the screaming of monkeys, broke out anew, while overhead a rustling and whistling as of a high wind arose in the tree-tops, accompanied by a hard pattering, as of great hailstones striking the lofty branches of the mimosas. It was the noise made by a troop of monkeys, running from branch to branch, and shaking the trees in their lightning passage.

Many a time, awake and with a rifle in my hands, I would sit on one of our boxes, and listen to the infernal concert of the forest in the tropical night. And the baby crocodile, from its tin, cried 'Mah . . . mah,' like a frog croaking. That little voice in the metallic box acquired a louder timbre and different note to what it did when its owner was freed from its prison. Also the little reptile seemed eager to contribute as much as possible to the chorus of savage voices in the forest.

At the first sign of dawn the wild animals retired to their dens in the heart of the thickets. Silence became almost universal — the hush before dawn. Only the furtive sounds of a belated scuffle arrived at lengthening intervals. In the greenish light, details began to be discerned. Then the day rapidly grew, like the raising of lights on a stage, for in these latitudes there is no tarrying between night and day, day and night.

As the days passed, while we waited for the Sultan's assent to our progressing through his dominions on our way to the unexplored north, we began to feel somewhat anxious. The Secretary told us that his lord had in truth not felt easy at our appearance in that place, for we were not merchants, but people of books and writing. We looked inside the mountains with a telescope, and wrote much on papers. Hereafter, anybody might come and find all we had seen, for the face of the earth was written down in our pages.

I assured the old gentleman that my work was a hobby, and that I did it in order to be able to carry away with me a

reminder of these ugly lands of the Aussa, which we much regretted having come so far to see. This contemptible opinion, far from offending the good Secretary, seemed to have a tranquillizing effect on him. That very evening he wrote another letter to the Sultan, and dispatched it by a special runner. Almost every day we exchanged polite messages with the Anfari. I wrote to him in any language, French, English, Spanish, or Italian, for whatever tongue we were able to employ was unknown to the Aussans. We always carefully explained to the Secretary, through our interpreter, what we had written, and this was duly repeated to the runner, who in turn relayed it to the Presence when he delivered the actual letter. The Secretary said it was an excellent thing to send written words to His Highness, for he appreciated them highly. One day the Secretary left us, as he had been summoned to appear before his master. In the evening he returned, and, in the course of a long conversation, he gave us to understand that the papers which we had sent to the Sultan seemed insufficient as passports, and that if we had any other 'Papers of Government' it was essential that we should produce them. He assured us that we might deliver up all our documents without the slightest misgiving as they would all be carefully returned to us. The Sultan was fully convinced of our good intentions, and had already agreed to allow us to purchase camels and millet, and replied favourably to our request to proceed to the north; but he would like to see a paper authorizing us to travel from the Plateau to the Aussa, as he felt sure that we must have one about us somewhere. If, on the other hand, we possessed no such document then the Sultan could not agree to sanction our travelling through his territory. We must either retrace our steps, or head straight for the frontier of French Somaliland—that is, meekly follow the set caravan route, taking one out of the Sultanate over the shortest possible line. He rather advised the latter course, as, although our God had protected us thus far, it was conceivable that He might omit to do so on the return

journey. In other words, like a good traveller, he was advising us not to go back on our tracks in a strange country.

It now became necessary to employ diplomacy. We were entirely without official passports, but what is a passport? At this juncture, our contribution to the negotiations was materially assisted by the fact that everything we said, or listened to, had to be interpreted. That gave us more time to think out, and skilfully shape, our answers and statements. We informed the Secretary, through the interpreter, that, naturally, we carried a highly important 'Paper of Government,' but that, as we feared to lose so momentous a document, we were anxious to place it before the Sultan with our own hands. He replied that he quite appreciated our point, and commended our discretion, and that so certainly was he convinced of the inestimable importance of the Paper of Government, which we had done him the honour to mention to him, if we cared to entrust it to his keeping, he would with his own hands carry it to his lord the Sultan. We assured him, through the interpreter, that we felt honoured and delighted by His Excellency's suggestion, and that we should feel even more honoured and delighted if His Excellency would first send a letter to the Sultan, saying that we proposed to send our highly important Paper of Government for His Highness's perusal at Furzi (where he was then in residence), by the hand of his able and distinguished secretary, and inquiring as to whether His Highness would be so gracious as to let us know, first of all, whether this proceeding would be in conformity with his wishes. The Secretary kindly acceded to our request, and promptly wrote and dispatched his letter to the Sultan.

There would now be a respite of twenty-four hours before the arrival of the Sultan's answer, and in twenty-four hours something can be done.

On going carefully through my papers, I discovered that I had a sort of permit, issued by the Abyssinian Government, authorizing me to enter the Plateau districts. It was a printed

form in Amharic, the blank spaces being completed in handwriting. Early the next morning, I summoned Makonnen, the only one of our Plateau men who could write Amharic, and requested him to address an envelope in that language to 'The Great Sultan of the Aussa,' so that I might send one of our usual French notes to the Sultan. When this was done, I looked at the result, and then pretended to be displeased because it was incorrect. 'Where,' I demanded, 'have you written Sultan? and where Aussa?' The boy pointed out each of the Amharic words in turn. By this means I discovered the Amharic signs for the word 'Aussa,' without arousing conjecture by asking directly. Still feigning to be dissatisfied, I made Makonnen direct three more envelopes in the same way. When he had finished, I told him his efforts were useless, and that I must send my letter to the Sultan without an envelope, as I had done hitherto. This I repeated to the Secretary, at the same time handing him our letter to be transmitted to his master.

The difficult circumstance about my little plot, which was merely to learn how to write the word 'Aussa' in Amharic, and then copy it on my Plateau pass, was that we lived in public. Our tent was always open, and everybody in the vicinity could plainly see all that we did. If I had ventured to close the flaps, without first making some cunningly devised excuse, the Secretary or some of his followers, who perpetually surrounded us, would almost certainly have come in to see what I was doing.

Now, having thus by subterfuge obtained from Makonnen several written examples of the word 'Aussa,' I put away my papers and writing-materials, and went out with Pastori to shoot. When we returned, I called my boy, Wolde Jesus, and requested him to lay out fresh clothes for me, as I intended to change those I wore. I then began to undress in our tent. Upon seeing this, Pastori, who had seated himself under a tree with the Secretary, called out to me that it would be more proper if I were to close the tent-flaps, instead of performing

my toilet in full view of a distinguished ambassador. Abdul Kader, who was always at hand, promptly translated this edifying remark to the Secretary, as we had intended. I immediately requested Wolde Jesus to close all the flaps of the tent, and to go on re-packing the heap of clothes which I had taken the precaution to fling outside, so as to keep him safely occupied.

Once alone inside the closed tent, I dressed in a moment. Then I took out the envelopes which Makonnen had addressed to the Sultan, and, placing them on the table, I studied closely the Amharic word 'Aussa.' I copied this word several times, as one might draw a copy of a picture; and then, spreading the Abyssinian pass on the table, I wrote the word immediately after the several names of places on the Plateau which it already bore. My ink was not only of a different shade, but it quickly soaked into the paper, and spread alarmingly: I retouched all the written words so as to give them a uniform appearance. All this was done in a few minutes, and, at its conclusion, I put all the papers in a small box, locked it, and went out to join my friends, who were sitting with the Secretary in the shadow of the trees. A quick glance of intelligence passed between Pastori, Rosina, and me; and they understood that everything had been arranged according to my plan.

As evening approached, the Secretary prepared to ride to his master at Furzi. Before he went, Pastori took him to our tent, and there dragged from under a camp-bed the box in which we kept articles of importance. This he opened, and after much searching amongst its contents, he took out a bundle of papers securely tied with string. After some difficulty, he managed to untie this and select a single document — the extraordinarily important 'Paper of Government' which authorized me to travel to certain places on the Plateau — and to the Aussa. This he handed to the Secretary with some ceremony, and begged him to be very careful to insure that it fell into no hands save those of His Highness the Sultan. The Secretary, delighted to have been successful in ac-

completing an important task laid on him by his august master, left for the royal presence in high spirits that evening.

On the morrow the good man returned, and reported to us that he had duly delivered the paper into the hands of the Sultan, and that an acknowledgment would be sent to us as soon as the paper had been translated.

Two days elapsed, forty-eight hours of anxiety. It was no small matter we were contemplating, either to have to retrace our steps, or tamely turn eastward to French Somaliland. If we succeeded in winning the favour of the Aussan chief, our subsequent progress, as far as political relations were concerned, would be comparatively easy. Our anxiety grew to alarm, as two days passed and no reply came from the Sultan. At last, on the third day, a special runner arrived, carrying our famous 'Paper of Government.' Bowing low and continuously, he informed us that his lord was perfectly satisfied with our credentials, and thanked us for sending them to him: he proposed to come in person to meet us in the course of the next few days. The Secretary was delighted with the happy outcome of the negotiations in which he had been engaged as intermediary. Before returning to Furzi, the special messenger informed us that as soon as the Sultan began to approach our camp we should be made aware of his proximity by the sound of the bugles of his heralds.

Perhaps only those who have attempted to travel amongst a primitive and suspicious people can appreciate the absurd difficulty, the virtual impossibility, of convincing them of one's good and harmless intentions when once the unintelligent demand for some paper, or other credential, has had to be disappointed. In the present instance, one of the reasons for demanding the production of a passport was undoubtedly a curiosity to discover in what terms the Abyssinian Government presumed to address the Sultan of the Aussa. Had we presented a paper from Addis Ababa, authorizing us in confident terms to travel in the Aussa, it is more than likely that the Aussan Ruler would have taken offence at it, and

denied us further passage through his dominions. The document which we had actually produced was, fortunately, not a passport, authorizing us with a great waving of the Abyssinian flag, to travel in the Aussa: it was merely a sort of tentative permit, such as might be, and indeed was, issued by a subordinate frontier official.

Entrance into Danakil was absolutely prohibited by the Abyssinian Government to avoid troubles with European Powers should any whites be massacred in that savage land. Let it be recalled that all expeditions previous to mine which had ventured into the interior had been wiped out. Further, Addis Ababa, as has been remarked elsewhere, has no authority whatever over Danakil outside of a narrow fringe skirt-ing the Plateau spurs, so that even if Addis Ababa had granted the broadest passport, in practice it would have been valueless among bloodthirsty and unruly tribes.

The European legations at the Ethiopian capital forbade their subjects to enter Danakil. This was an order well known to everybody in the country, and automatic respect for it was assured by reason of the risk to one's life its infringement incurred, apart from rousing official wrath should one come back after an attempt. However, to make sure that we were acquainted with the rule, our respective legations warned us to desist from our plans once they became known, though we had tried to make our preparations as quietly as possible for fear of official intrusion.

So we had left Addis Ababa a few days in advance of what even some of our friends anticipated, and, as the reader may recollect, Pastori and I left the town by motor car to forestall exactly what we knew was awaiting us: being checked on Addis Ababa station platform. Rosina's departure alone was not sufficient to raise suspicions, as long as the authorities reckoned that two of us, Pastori and I, were still liable to be caught in the capital. We joined Rosina at Akaki, a little station down the line. After this we could consider ourselves practically free.

We had stopped at Awash, as the reader knows, to organize our caravan, but had we tarried there, the arm of officialdom would have reached us. As a matter of fact, two days before our setting off from Awash station for Danakil proper, Pastorini and Rosina received, by the railway telegraph, one further summons to appear at their legation at the capital. They ignored it, of course, but we made haste to leave. Not answering it, we feared an official would come down with the next bi-weekly train to serve the summons in person. And indeed we surmised rightly, for we learnt — months later — that the very train which we heard coming into Awash station as we had travelled barely a few miles from it actually bore an envoy to stop my two comrades. The rumbling of that train was the last sound of the civilization we were leaving behind us, which seemed to be doing its best through the narrow-mindedness of some of its representatives to prevent us from bringing a tangible sign of our advancement among savage people, most of whom had never seen white men before.

The impossibility, therefore, of our securing a passport for Danakil (apart from the paramount uselessness of any document among 'trophies'-hunters) is evident, but when we came across a Sultan of the Aussa who wanted to see a 'Paper of Government,' something had to be done not to disappoint him and to ensure that our hard-pursued objectives were not going to be missed for lack of support from a scrap of paper.

To return to our Aroberifaghe sojourn, from every point of the compass more and more people now came pouring into the immediate vicinity of our camp. Many came from the district about Furzi, and these brought wonderful accounts of the Sultan's preparations for departure. We now had nothing to do but wait for the first sounds of those bugles which were to inform us of the imminent approach of the Presence.

THE SULTAN

ALMOST every day the Secretary travelled to and fro, between the Sultan's capital and our camp, in order to keep him and us informed of everything which happened. At last a morning came when he returned and informed us that the Presence would arrive that afternoon. As the afternoon approached, an envoy came almost every hour to inform us of the procession's advance. At last, amidst the noise of the people who thronged about our roped enclosure, we heard the first faint shrilling of the bugles. A sudden silence fell on all the people, and in the stillness the high-pitched calls came winging sweetly out of the depths of the forest to the southward.

A great agitation now arose among the Aussans, some ran one way, some another, as they made off in groups to meet the procession. At last, after manys days of petty annoyance, we had peacefully receded into the place of secondary importance. Our unconscious tormentors had found a more attractive object for their gaping curiosity. The Secretary, together with another elder, who had arrived that morning, remained with us. Some time after the crowd had dispersed they informed us that a special place had been prepared, where we might await the Sultan's arrival, for the forest about our camp was so thick that it would be impossible for us to see anything. Taking with us Abdul Kader and Wolde Jesus, we accompanied the two elders to the place they had spoken of. The

remainder of our men were commanded to remain in the camp, in order to protect our belongings from the depredations of the many pilferers who would soon be returning with the procession. Following the elders, we came to a natural clearing some two hundred yards from our camp. Here, we seated ourselves under a large tamarisk, while the bugle-notes grew louder and more discordant. Each bugler played his own tune, or no-tune, and the total effect was anything but beautiful.

The open space in which we found ourselves was flat and sandy, in form a rectangle some 200 yards by 100 yards. It lay parallel to the river, and was bordered with mimosas and tamarisks. A large party of elders and dignitaries awaited us, and, as we seated ourselves in one corner of the rectangle, these men came and arranged themselves on either side of us, in the form of a horse-shoe. They were clothed in white cotton sheets and splendid turbans.

Mingled with the sounds of the bugles, we now heard vocal war-cries, becoming every moment more distinct. I noticed Wolde Jesus sitting behind my shoulder, the only Plateau man in all the company. He had dressed himself elaborately, and was evidently proud of the honour of assisting us on such an occasion.

Suddenly, in the opposite angle of the open space a party of cavalry, about a hundred strong, made their appearance. On seeing where we sat, they increased their pace and charged down upon us at a furious gallop, yelling, flourishing their lances, and discharging their rifles in the air. The horses, excited by the babel of noises made by their riders, and by the tinkling of their bells and the flapping at their flanks of the red cloth caparisons, reared and plunged furiously. It was a colourful and savagely beautiful spectacle: a homogeneous squadron of dark centaurs, fearfully bedecked with the skins of wild animals, and banded about the neck with strings of teeth and bones. The heavy dust, struck up by four hundred beating hooves, rose to the knees of the light elegant animals,

whose heads looked so fine and small that one felt they might have been enclosed between one's two hands. Their legs being partly obscured by the flat dust-cloud, the centaurs appeared as though galloping on the air. They were still at a little distance from the place where we sat when a single horseman, closely followed by four others, bounded ahead of the rest with prodigious leaps. When almost upon us, the leader checked his flying horse with a touch of the bridle, and immediately the animal reared up on his hind legs, and came down again, while his rider saluted us with repeated gestures of his arm, keeping his eyes directed piercingly upon us. This manœuvre was repeated by the four horsemen who followed, while the remainder of the squadron wheeled about, and galloped away towards the corner from whence it had issued. After a second salute, the leader wheeled his animal, and by astonishing bounds, overtook and mingled with the main body before it had reached the farther corner. The whole of these manœuvres were repeated three times, and at last, after a final salute, by the leader and his four officers, all the horsemen withdrew, disappearing like a flash into the woods.

They had scarcely gone, and we were still voicing our appreciation of their display to the elders, when from the same corner there appeared a company of foot at the double. They too numbered about a hundred, and the moment they saw us they began to yell furiously. They ran to the centre of the clearing, where they separated into two groups, which immediately raced to opposite ends of that open space. On reaching these respective positions, they faced about, rushed together, met in the middle, and crossing in confusion, took up the positions which their opponents had just vacated. They were all armed with rifles, and wore conspicuous headgear, calculated to inspire fear in the enemy.

Another group of infantry now made its appearance, coming from the same corner as before. This group remained in Indian file, and yelled as wildly as the others had done. The men proceeded, running one behind the other, down the long

side of the clearing, opposite to where we sat. On coming to the end of that side, the leader wheeled about and ran back again, followed by all the others. This they continued to do, forming a continually moving line of men along the whole length of that side. Three sides of the arena were thus lined with troops, for the first company of infantry had remained in position at either end. All continued to chant some war song without pause. In the midst of this, a compact group of footmen marched into the arena. High about their heads they carried a large scarlet umbrella. This last honourable emblem covered the head of the Sultan himself. He now became visible to us in glimpses, between the crush of his attendants. In a moment the escort fell away to each side, so as to allow the Presence to be plainly seen. He rode a white horse, and was followed immediately by the slave who carried the red umbrella, and a number of officials. These officials stationed themselves in that corner of the clearing which was diagonally opposite to our corner. There the Sultan dismounted from his horse under a mimosa tree. A folding-chair, draped with a red cloth, had been placed for him by his attendants. Four soldiers, with their rifles preserved in red flannel bags, took up their position behind the chair. Red is the royal colour in the Aussa.

The cavalry now reappeared, and each horseman proceeded to ride independently in whatever direction he chose, the main object of each seeming to be to out-do all the others in the loudness of his yelling, and the energy of his gesticulation. At a signal, which was unseen by us, they massed in the centre of the arena, and after the captain had delivered a final salute, the whole squadron leapt away out of sight in an instant, and were no more seen.

The footmen, who had been moving in Indian file, now halted and formed in a double line along their side of the rectangle. Then the two parties which had been formed up at either end, ran together and crossed again, as they had done at first. They repeated this a number of times, singing

a monotonous war song the while. Two buglers had stationed themselves, one on either side of the Sultan, but they remained silent.

Now a group of officials, from the Sultan's escort, crossed the arena to convey to us their master's greetings, while from our side the Secretary, accompanied by two of the elders, went to convey our respects to the Sultan. The leader of the cavalry, and his four officers, also came on foot to meet us, and when I had made some remarks, through Abdul Kader, in appreciation of their display, they took me to see their horses. These were grazing still saddled. Though not particularly beautiful, they appeared to be very wiry little animals, and were probably possessed of great powers of endurance.

I returned to our corner of the arena, and listened to, and made, a number of polite speeches. The ministers and officials who had joined our party said that the Anfari considered us as his personal friends, and they felt sure we entertained similar feelings towards him. We assured them that, in our opinion, His Highness was greater than the sun and the Awash put together, and added further that we suspected that the brand (a star) seen on his camels signified that he was master of the stars. We were positively certain that his ministers were all moons. These astronomic compliments were received with much appreciation. The good fellows expanded more and more, and began to ask many questions, 'Is it true that in your country there are railways everywhere, and that you have iron birds which fly with men inside them? Many future generations of our race will speak of you. Is it true that in your country water sometimes turns into stone, and that people actually die of the cold?'

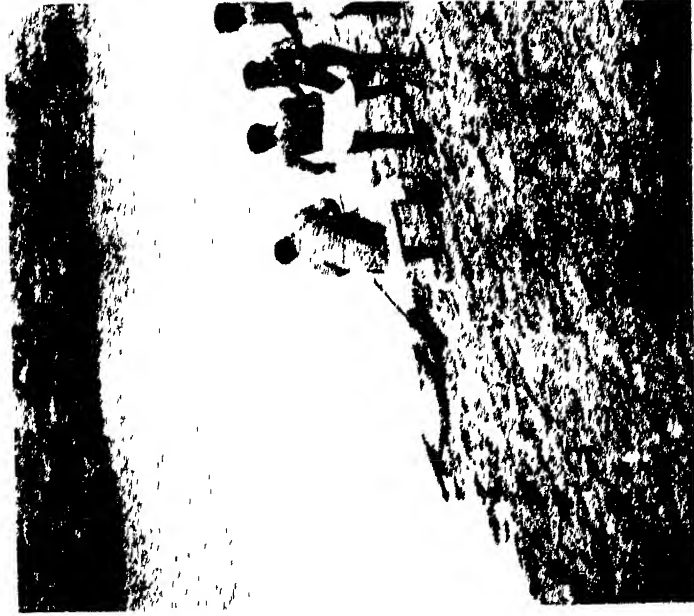
In the meantime, our friend the Secretary was moving hither and thither, endeavouring to ascertain whether we were to be received by the Sultan that day, or the next. Some servants of the Presence came to receive refreshments for their master; they were sent to our kitchen, that they might be given what they needed. One of these servants was a young

negro of slave race, and, physically, he was the most well-made man I have ever seen. He was one of the Sultan's runners, and indeed it was appropriate employment for him. As a runner he moved in the most perfectly graceful way imaginable. He scarcely seemed to touch the ground with his feet: it was rather as though he moved on the air, or like a swift prancing horse. His speed was extraordinary: every step took him far ahead with a noiseless leap. He was not a tall man, but justly proportioned, and of a sooty black hue. I have never seen his like. He had that day borne the red umbrella over his master.

The Secretary came, with an important air, to say that the Sultan asked to postpone the meeting until the morrow, for he had been tired by the journey, and it was now getting late. He intended to remain at Aroberifaghe during the ensuing days.

The Sultan possesses several residences scattered amongst the better parts of his dominions, and he visits them periodically. The houses are mere huts, a little better than those of his subjects, but devoid of furniture, with the exception of beds in the form of a massive wooden frame on legs, strung with strips of raw hide, and a few mats.

When we returned to our camp, we found that four camels laden with bread, milk, and melted butter, had just arrived, together with twelve head of cattle, two dozen goats, and a similar number of sheep. What we were to do with all this bounty was not immediately apparent. We could only give it away to somebody else. But strings of camels had also arrived, laden with provisions for the followers of the Sultan. Cattle were being slaughtered on every side. We hinted to the Secretary that his master's gifts to us were excessive. He replied that they were in proportion to the power of the bountiful giver, but that if we should desire to give away any part of the present, then His Highness's ministers and advisers, not excluding his Secretary and devoted servant, would be very willing to receive it, and to thank us. We, accordingly



DRAWING SHOT GAME TO THE BANK
OF THE AWASH AT AROBERIFAGIE



SLAUGHTERING CATTLE AT
AROBIFAGIE

retained only a few head of the livestock for ourselves, and presented the remainder to the exalted personages who had kept us company under the tamarisk during the displays of the afternoon. Our men did their utmost to show their appreciation of the royal generosity, making themselves sicker than ever. They had been gorging themselves with food, out of all sane measure, for some days now. There was a continuous butchering, and cooking, and eating. It was as though the people found themselves amongst mountains of provisions, which they could never possibly eat in their entirety. Perhaps their feeling was that of the mouse when he finds himself in a granary containing thousands of bushels of wheat. Nobody drank water: milk was drunk from buckets. There was cow-milk, camel-milk, and goat-milk, and every evening, when the fresh full skins arrived, the half-emptied ones of the previous day were emptied into the river. Our men poured a golden stream of liquid butter into pans heaped with meat, and gave them away for the asking.

The saturnalia was completed in the quiet glades of the forest, where nameless excesses were indulged in. When Pastori and I went out shooting, we found that many women had gathered in those quiet places, where they joined in a wild orgy with the men. Thieves too became active, and we were obliged to keep our camp closely guarded. Some of our men lost sandals, which they had left on the ground within the limits of our camp, and even the Secretary discovered that some of his things were missing. Thereafter, he placed his saddle-bags and other gear against our tent, where they were more secure.

Pastori and I had made a hiding-place for ourselves, a mile downstream of our camp. We were in the habit of posting ourselves on the limbs of a tree, which leaned out over the water flowing some fifteen feet below us, muddy and thick. Now and then, a sudden vibration would shake the lower branches, which dipped into the water. This was caused by the knobby backs of crocodiles, rubbing against the partially

submerged branches. Then the reptiles would raise their eyes out of the water to look at us, after which they would submerge again, and then come up in another place, to watch us from a different angle.

Wild boars were in the habit of coming to a stretch of sloping bank opposite to us, in order to drink. They forced their way out of the thick undergrowth between the trees. A large boar would come out, and stand just clear of the thicket, casting nervous glances up and downstream. Seeing no sign of crocodiles, he would give a short grunt and take a few tentative steps forward. And now behind him a mob of little pigs emerge with their mother from the jungle, and all trot after the boar. The latter knocks the more eager ones back with sidelong blows of his head. Suddenly he comes to a halt, and stands as if turned to stone, looking intently towards some point whence he has heard a hostile sound. The whole family stands motionless, with pricked ears. Then the sow goes to the water's edge, and cautiously begins to drink. The little ones follow, all huddled together. The boar continues to survey the scene, shaking his crest now and then. At last he too goes down to drink, and the sow and her farrow of young turn, and scurry up the slope into the safety of the jungle.

Boars seemed to exercise no caution if they saw monkeys already drinking, and monkeys in their turn relied on birds in this way.

Pastori and I were watching the wild animals on the morning after the Sultan's arrival, when a man came to tell us that he had been sent to summon us. The Secretary met us on our return, and told us that his master had been busy administering justice that morning, and that to mark the occasion of our meeting he had sentenced two men to death.

As we accompanied the Secretary to the meeting, he explained to us that the Sultan had ordered his camp to be removed to a little distance. He said it was the habit of the great ones never to remain long on the same spot when they were travelling. This precaution was taken as a measure of

safety, though the Sultan himself had a large bodyguard always in attendance, and as many more soldiers scattered in the woods round his camp. In fact, Pastori and I had already seen a number of men, watching from places of concealment.

Continuing through the forest, we presently came to a spot where the trees were very large, the thick grass growing underneath them. Under a large mimosa, we saw a group of the royal guards. Other soldiers loitered about, some of them with their rifles in red flannel bags. The almost religious silence and solemnity which hovered over these people plainly told us that the Sultan was present. Our messenger signed to us to halt, and himself went forward. But in a moment he turned round again and bowed to us, whereat we advanced. In the shadow of the great tree the Sultan sat surrounded by his ministers and courtiers. All stood stiffly erect, and as motionless as though they had been statues. There was no turning round, or gaping or craning of necks, but a formal stiffness, which I much appreciated.

The Sultan rose from his folding chair, and came a few steps forward to take our hands. He bowed many times, and spoke continually in a low soft tone, very pleasant to the ear, though we could not understand his words. We responded in similar tones in our own tongue, and there we stood for some minutes, the Aussan Sultan and three Europeans, all whispering together, and bending our heads with great assiduity, and holding hands. The Sultan then with a sweep of his hand effected a general introduction between ourselves and his ministers. These now relaxed their stiff attitudes, smiled upon us, and said a few words, to which we responded. The Sultan then made a sign, and all, after bowing low to us, retired to the shade of a distant tree. We were now left alone with the Sultan and our interpreter. We seated ourselves on some boxes, which we ourselves had lent His Highness for seats the evening before. Abdul Kader, in a new turban-cloth, stood at one side.

The Anfari, or Sultan, Muhammad Yaio was some thirty-

two years of age, small, intelligent, with features of an European cast under his coffee-brown skin. He had soft eyes, and a constant smile slightly curved the corners of his mouth, unobscured by the little beard. Though small, he was well proportioned, and his gestures were quiet and tranquil, the movements of a man accustomed to command. He wore a fine cotton cloth wound round his shoulders and body, and his head was uncovered. He had slipped off his sandals when we approached, and now, having re-seated himself on his chair, he placed his toes on the lowest rung. He wore no weapon, and seemed altogether a simple-mannered man.

This pleasant ruler asked for news of our journey, and inquired as to whether we had met with any difficulties, and where we wished to go next. These inquiries were repeated several times, in order to denote a high degree of kindly interest in the speaker, such being the custom of the country.

We asked the Anfari to sanction our purchase of camels and millet and goatskins, and to this he agreed immediately. He then inquired as to whether we really intended to cross the Biru Sultanate, and pass on to the 'lands of fire,' meaning the active volcanic zone of Upper Danakil, and when we replied in the affirmative, he advised us to abandon the risky plan, and turn towards Tajura in French Somaliland. There, said he, we might hire a native boat to take us to Jibuti: thus we might be sure of seeing our homes again. But when he saw that we were firm in our purpose, he wished us success. He said that he could promise that no harm should befall us so long as we remained in his dominions, but that as soon as we proposed to leave them, and enter the Biru Sultanate, we must do so at our own peril. He further hinted, doubtless as a piece of advice, that to have got thus far on our way we must have used our heads far more than our rifles.

The Sultan then asked about those iron birds which flew with people inside them, and wanted to know how many soldiers one of them could carry. Further he asked, was it true that I was putting all the country on a piece of paper?

Was such a thing possible? I replied that all the world was inside a few books. He asked us to describe Khartoum and Istanboul to him. And what was this America? He also wanted to see our 'watch,' by means of which we could ascertain where there were villages and water. This last was a pocket compass, which Pastori had shown to the Secretary one day. We told the Sultan that we would send him one of these watches in the afternoon.

After talking for some two hours, and the heat increasing greatly, we decided to take leave of our host. We thanked him again for his bountiful hospitality, and for promising that we should be enabled to purchase such camels and millet as we required. He said that he had already given orders about this matter, and added that he intended to supply us with a guide, and also with 'the Silver Baton of Command,' when we were ready to leave for Biru. We thanked him heartily for this great favour, for the Silver Baton would ensure us a safe passage through any part of his dominions. I offered to take a photograph of the Sultan, but he answered very amiably that he could not do what his father had never done. We then took leave of him and retired.

In the afternoon, Pastori, who was clever at bargaining, went to discuss with the Sultan's men the purchase of the camels we required. They demanded a thousand thalers for ten animals, a price at least double that which was usual. We were to receive as a gift three large sacks of millet, and twenty-six goatskin water-bags; also the camels were in perfect condition, with humps so high and round that it would be difficult to place a pack-saddle securely on their backs. Nevertheless, in spite of all these advantages, the price asked was exorbitant. The Secretary, never at a loss for a word of explanation or advice, observed that when one of the great ones of the earth condescends to dispose of his possessions he cannot be expected to use the same prices as an ordinary merchant. It appeared that we had no alternative but to pay the price demanded, so we sent Settie with some others of our

men to select the ten best from a herd of forty splendid animals. These were all branded on the neck with the Sultan's five-pointed star. Our men were so anxious to choose only superlatively good beasts that they contented themselves with selecting only seven from that herd. They were to get the remaining three camels at Furzi, when they went to receive the three sacks of millet and the goatskin bags. The Sultan, having carried his point, and obtained the price he had demanded, graciously sent us a further gift of eight cows and twenty goats. These, however, we decided not to accept.

In the afternoon, three murderers, who had lately been terrorizing the district, were brought to justice. Finding themselves relentlessly hunted, they had surrendered, hoping that the unusual nature of the Sultan's visit to these parts would have created in his breast a feeling conducing to light sentences. They made a miscalculation, for the Sultan acted as his father would have done, and had their heads cut off.

We heard a good deal about Muhammad Yaio's father. When he had grown old, and appeared about to die, his wise men had recommended that a male and a female slave should be put to death near the old man's bed, so that their death agonies might shed some light on the measures to be taken to save his life. This was done, the earthen floor of the royal hut was flooded with human blood, but the Sultan died. Some of the wise men asserted that two victims had not been sufficient in the case of so great a monarch, so an effort was made to atone for that shortcoming on the installation of the new Sultan.

The Anfari returned to his palace at Furzi on the evening of the day on which we had been received by him. The shrilling of the bugles called all his men together, and then the cavalcade defiled through the trees, until it was lost to sight to the southward. The bugle-notes grew fainter and fainter, and at last ceased altogether. So departed the most exalted of the Danakils, the ruler of the legendary Aussa.

In our camp, nothing was now heard but the sounds of

the men's labour, and the infrequent voices of the few gapers who remained. All the great concourse of officials, and soldiers, and populace, had vanished as though they had never been. Only the Secretary, urbane as ever, remained as his master's representative.

Night fell, and the hyenas, leopards, and jackals raised their savage cries, which mingled with the wailing of frightened monkeys, the thudding of crocodiles, and the stertorous breathing of hippopotami.

LOSS OF MAKONNEN

THE day after the Sultan's departure, we were joined by the guide whom he had promised to send us, and with him came the Silver Baton and most of the purchased camels. We were obliged to wait a few days longer at Aroberifaghe for the return of our men from Furzi, with the remaining camels, the goatskins, and the millet.

One afternoon, I was fishing from the bank of the river when a ridiculous thing happened. We were sitting under some bushes, Wolde Jesus and I, when, on turning round, I saw amongst the leaves of the nearest tree a snake, which continually made its appearance and then vanished, only to reappear after a second or two. It seemed to be feeling its way round the tree-trunk. My boy urged me, with signs of trepidation on his face, to leave the place. I hesitated for a moment, undecided whether to allow a snake to drive me away, when all at once a large monkey jumped away from the tree. That which we had supposed to be a snake was merely the tail of the monkey, the remainder of the animal's body having been hidden from sight by the tree-trunk.

The natives had taken to bathing in the stream near our camp, for the great numbers of people who had thronged down to the water during the days of the Sultan's visit had driven all the crocodiles and hippopotami further up or downstream. One day, the few natives who still remained about

our camp entered the water, and with much yelling and kicking, began to disport themselves there. An elderly man was among them, and he began to swim across the river, which at this point was some fifty yards wide, and of considerable depth. He had covered a third of the distance, when his strength failed him, and the current carried him away. I could see that he would be drowned, even before he drifted down to the crocodiles. We asked the Secretary, who was standing on the bank with us, to order the bathers to rescue the old man. Our friend seemed surprised at our request, but he gave the order, and the old man was dragged from the water.

‘In another minute he would have been drowned,’ I said.

‘And after that?’ said the Secretary gently. ‘Allah is Great, and if He did not propose to continue the old man’s life, why should we presume to do so?’

On the same afternoon, the Secretary left us, accompanied by his son, a pleasant lad with charming manners. This boy had been in the habit of remaining close to our tent, where he would command the gapers not to press against our rope, but to be respectful, and not to make a clamour. I made him a few presents at parting, and these he accepted with an extreme grace of politeness. Amongst the Danakils the differences of manners in individuals of different occupations, or classes, are far greater than they are amongst Europeans. On the other hand, arrogance and snobbery are never seen.

Both the Secretary and his son kissed our hands before leaving with their escort.

Now that we were no longer under surveillance, Pastori and I decided that the time had come to make some observation of the district. On the pretence of shooting, we made our way downstream through the forest for some miles. Eventually we reached the point where the river bifurcated, and beyond this point, between the two branches, irrigated lands stretched farther than we could see. The banks of the river were here solidly re-inforced with dykes, so that it could be

dammed and controlled even in the flood season. The forest, which was very thick, came to an end at some distance upstream of the bifurcation. On the opposite bank, the country was slightly undulating, but in front, to the east, it appeared to be perfectly flat. Horses and cattle grazed here and there, and signs of husbandry were evident.

As it was growing late, we were obliged regretfully to return. Re-entering the forest, we began to open a way for ourselves with difficulty in the thick vegetation. Presently we came to a place where the Awash described a curve which was almost a complete circle. The peninsula thus formed was a den of wild animals of every kind. We pressed through this region with the utmost difficulty, for, with the approach of evening, we found ourselves in semi-darkness. Wild animals continually showed themselves, disturbed by our passage. We seemed to be in low vaults, filled with a hot humid atmosphere, and the earth appeared to heave under the weight of the oppressive vegetation. The conditions in that section of the forest were as trying as any which I had experienced before. In some places, tall thick grass grew between the trees, grass which rose higher than our heads, and met the lower branches of the trees. Disturbed snakes moved away with an awful rustling in this long grass. We forced our way through, with our arms before our faces, and when we came to undergrowth we crawled along the ground, and forced a passage with our shoulders. Birds and monkeys sat and watched us curiously, and sometimes we saw a leopard, a hyena, or a jackal skulking away with a sidelong glance at us. On the opposite bank of the river, the front ranks of trees leaned out over the stream, under the thrust of their fellows behind them.

After great labour, we crossed the savage peninsula, and came to the more open forest. Here, we were able to increase our pace, and soon reached camp and relieved Rosina's anxiety. We found an abundance of game and fish awaiting us, far more than we could possibly eat, and I wondered how

soon the days would come when we should remember with longing the gargantuan abundance of Aroberifaghe. But there was bad news, too, for we learnt that Rosina's last mule had been bitten by a snake, and had died within a few minutes. Nor was this the worst, for we were also told that Makonnen had been absent from camp some hours longer than could be satisfactorily explained. He had been engaged, in his turn, in keeping watch on our grazing animals. We never saw him again.

Makonnen was a good servant, an impressionable soul. Tears would come into his eyes when we had occasion to scold him, always for some trifling fault, never for an act of malevolence or bad will. He would bend his head, confess his fault, and express contrition. He had received some education at the Addis Ababa Christian Mission.

The Danakils, who continually moved about in the forest, spying on us and our men, had become bold after the Sultan's departure, and now they had seized an opportunity of securing a victim. This was the second man we had lost in this way.

In the night, rain fell, and we concluded that the wet season had set in all along the Awash valley, as the river had risen considerably during the last few days. The little crocodile appeared to enjoy the night downpours. The abundance of fish it had eaten had made it fat, and from its tank it said 'Mah . . . mah' all night long.

Rain fell again in the morning, and continued till noon. The river rose at an alarming rate, and in three hours had risen ten feet. We began to fear that our men, returning from Furzi with the camels, the goatskins, and the millet, would find themselves unable to ford the river. Once the latter had begun to rise, it was not likely again to subside for several months. We stuck staves into the bank, to enable us to gauge its rate of increase, and found that it rose quickly and steadily. Large trees, and the carcasses of animals, came floating and spinning on the thick muddy current. The growing mass of water became fearful to us. We stuck the sticks in the bank at about

a foot from the surface of the stream, at the level which we judged to be the limit of safety for our camp. But in the late afternoon the river was still rising, so we were forced to evacuate our position. Alio, the guide sent to us by the Sultan, assured us that the place of our encampment would never be swamped, and that it was perfectly safe to remain, but we preferred to leave, notwithstanding. We feared that if the Awash were to overflow its banks at some point upstream, we might find ourselves marooned. We loaded in haste and moved away, retracing our steps of ten days earlier. Having reached the low volcanic hills, we made our camp anew, and settled ourselves to await the arrival of our men from Furzi.

At night, we lighted fires, as a signal to them that we had changed the position of our camp. It was well we did so, for we were all asleep when the four men arrived. We were overjoyed at seeing them, for we had been contemplating the necessity of proceeding on our way without them, unless they made their appearance in the course of the next day or two. They told us they had found the ford extremely difficult, but they had lost nothing in passing it. A few hours later the river would have been unfordable, and it would have been necessary to make an enormous detour, for there are no boats in the Aussa. We had been in the nick of time, for from that night onwards the Awash was to be an insurmountable barrier for many months to come.

On the next day we had the wet millet spread in the sun to dry, and we Europeans took refuge under some trees at the base of the hill. I had a curiosity to see how the river had behaved during the night, and I also wanted to discover whether Alio's assertion that the site of our old camp would not be inundated was correct. Accordingly, Pastori and I made our way to the river. We had to exercise caution, as water, in some places several feet deep, was flowing in all directions on the lower ground. We eventually reached the forest belt, where we found some parts flooded and others dry. We found it possible to make our way to the river bank, and from there we could see in the distance the place of our

old camp. Alio was right. The water had risen considerably since we had left on the preceding evening, but the site of our camp was still dry. We received the impression that the control exercised over the flood by means of the old engineering works of the Arabs was very complete. There evidently existed dykes, which allowed the water to overflow only at a certain height, when it was either carried away in the irrigation canals, or else permitted to flood certain selected useless areas. By this means, no uncontrolled flooding took place; the water was always kept at a safe height under the dykes which regulated the supply to the oasis.

We found that the surface of the river had grown very much wider, and that crocodiles now swam over what had recently been dry land. We cast a last glance at this Awash, this mute witness of our struggles during two months, and then turned and went back to our camp.

In the afternoon a young man, a camel-herd, came to see us. He must have walked some miles, for his herd was not in sight. We saw that he was no Danakil, and in fact, when he caught sight of some of our Plateau men, he nearly swooned with joy. He was one of the Sultan's slaves, and originally came from the neighbourhood of Addis Ababa. He had been stolen from his village by a merchant some time before, and, after various vicissitudes, had been brought to the Aussa, where he had passed into the possession of the Sultan. He spoke the Galla tongue, and our Galla boys were sadly impressed by what he had to tell them. The poor youth begged us to take him away with us. He would hide in a sack, he said, in a box, anywhere. We had to say that, unfortunately, we needed the Sultan's help. We had in our camp at that moment a guide, supplied by the slave's master, and we did not doubt that if we took the poor fellow away with us this guide would immediately leave us, and go to report the circumstance to the Anfari. It was regrettable that the lad had not made his appearance among us while the Sultan was at Aroberifaghe, for then we might have succeeded in purchasing his manumission.

In the late afternoon we gave orders to load. We were almost ready to set out when a hot wind arose, and rushed upon us from the deserts to the north. We scarcely had time to prepare ourselves to receive the storm before the sky was heavily overcast. The wind blew furiously, carrying clouds of sand, as all ran to shelter in the lee of the jutting rocks. We huddled closer into our clothes, and covered our faces with our arms, while the sand-laden wind whirled about us. We saw the sun as through smoked glass. Lightning rent the sky, and the rumbling of thunder drew nearer. In a few moments more the first raindrops fell, and we were soon deluged by a heavy downpour. The rain brought down with it much of the sand and dust which hung in the air, covering us with mud.

When the storm passed over, and the atmosphere grew clear again, we left the shelter of the rocks, and proceeded with our preparations to leave. We had filled all our goatskin water-bags, for, in crossing the Kurub and Sardo deserts, we expected to find no water for the next three or four stages.

At last we descended to the foot of the hill, and there Koko saluted and left us. We were very sorry to see the last of this extraordinarily reliable and versatile servant. He proceeded to Furzi, where he had procured a position in the Sultan's household.

A vast plain now opened in front of us. In some parts it was sandy, and in others consisted of curled and blistered clay. Some of these latter places were now slippery after the rain, and distressing to camels. The whole prospect was monotonous and depressing, without a sign of life. This was the entrance to Upper Danakil, a country the secrets of which we were determined to discover. A momentary feeling of dismay clutched at my heart, as the thought of the explorers who had lost their lives in this terrible land crossed my mind. This was quickly gone, however, for we were now in action again, and had little time for meditation.

Ahead of us, the mountain Kulsu Kuma grew every mo-

ment more distinct. To the eastward rose Mount Borauli, and to the west we could still see the faint line of the river vegetation at Gallifaghe. After nightfall we continued to advance, as, although the light of the new moon was weak, the evenness of the ground allowed us to proceed without uncertainty. We passed by the double-peaked Kulsu Kuma, which stood isolated on the desert, and it quickly disappeared from sight behind us. After marching for five and a half hours, we halted to rest, a small collection of living atoms in the immense wilderness of earth and sky.

As soon as the sun rose, the heat became torrid. We were soon in motion on the burning desert, which was here intersected by walls of basalt. These stood out in sharp lines of metallic blackness against the white dazzling plain. Not a sign of life was visible; there was no animate thing besides ourselves in the whole glistening wilderness. We were in lands sunken below sea-level, and just as, on rising above sea-level, the air grows rarer and cooler, so here it was heavy and fiercely hot.

We three Europeans continued to walk on foot, as had been our custom hitherto. The two surviving mules carried only water-bottles, ready for immediate use. We were now on the second waterless march, and at its conclusion about a pint of water would be issued to each man in the caravan. For food, we had dry crusts of unleavened millet bread, which had been baked on hot cobbles. Our men chewed the meat they had dried at Aroberifaghe, eking it out with millet grain, or flour. There was no fuel on the plain, with which to make a fire for cooking. Where there was no vegetation, we could have a fire only when a camel had to be abandoned; then we made fuel of the sticks in its pack-saddle. We still had some seventy miles of waterless desert to cross, and our chief concern was to complete this distance before our water came to an end. Wrapping cloths about us, as a protection from the fierce sunshine, we struggled grimly onwards. But at noon we felt we could not have kept on to save our lives. We hurriedly raised our tent, and crawled

under it, seeking a little respite from the burning heat. We told some of the men to make use of Rosina's small tent, and others found refuge under sacks and camel saddles, propped up with their sticks. Nobody felt any desire for food; we were all more dead than alive. Though we were all hardened to fatigue and rough living, we now realized that there was something particularly trying in the climate of a sunken desert. In the boundless desolation, broken only by beetling spurs of volcanic rock, all seems to boil under the blinding glare. The evaporation of sweat leaves a crust of salt on the exposed parts of one's body. You go on your way, bent down in the heavy motionless air, or catch weakly at a rope which hangs from the saddle of a camel. Nothing strays from the caravan now. Two goats, which we carried with us, had to be tied together during the first march, for they were continually running away. Now they had been loosed, but they followed us closely, with sad bleatings.

The goatskins had made the water foul, and that which came out of some of them was blackish and opaque, and gave off a revolting odour that made it impossible for one to drink it. We decided to reserve these until the last, by which time, we had little doubt, we should have become less fastidious.

We remained hidden until the sun set, and as soon as its last torturing flicker had vanished below the horizon, we left our shelters, and loaded the animals again. A herd of wild asses crossed in front of us. Moving in Indian file at a slow pace, towards the north-west, as if marching on a set course in the wilderness, they presented a sad and lonely sight. There was no pasturage for scores of miles around, and these animals seemed to have deviated from their original course on seeing our camels, perhaps expecting to find food and drink. These donkeys can support thirst almost as long as a camel. As they diverged away from us, their reddish backs showed strongly against the yellow evening sky.

Darkness fell, and the wan moon watched once more our little efforts, as of frail ants defying the desert and the un-

known. Even night-marching in this inferno was not easy, for all through the dark hours the earth radiated the immense stores of heat which it had absorbed during the day. We steered by the Pole Star, and I, at any rate, was in a measure comforted by the thought that every aching step brought me nearer home.

At last we came to the foot of the Sardo Hills, where we decided to halt. We tethered our animals, so that they might not stray away in search of water, and then dropped down like stones where we stood. It was not until some two hours later that we had recovered sufficient energy to superintend the arrangement of our encampment.

Alio, our guide and Silver Baton bearer, had told us that we should find water under these same Sardo Hills, and at sunrise we found that he had gone out in search of the well. But some time later he came back, and informed us that all the water-holes were dry. This was grave news, though, fortunately, we still had sufficient water for two marches.

This Alio was not a satisfactory companion, being proud and sulky of disposition. The morose attitude which he adopted both annoyed and perplexed us. We were entirely in his hands, for the country was quite unknown, except to a few natives. It was an uninhabited desert, and, consequently, even the Danakils had no occasion to travel in it. Apart from his bad disposition, Alio appeared to know very little about the country we were in. His announcement that he had with difficulty found the water-holes under Sardo (apart from the tremendous fact of their being dry) was by no means reassuring. He was absolutely dumb concerning the names of mountains, and the physical features of the country in general, which I wanted for my geographical survey. By dint of great patience and much questioning of the other men, I was enabled to fix the more important points. The man had probably been instructed by his master, the Sultan, to hinder our map-making activities.

By the time Alio reported to us that there was no water,

the sun was already high in the heavens. It was a bad time to start on our fourth waterless march. We decided there was nothing to be done but wait until the evening, before resuming our march. Some of our men wanted to go in two parties to explore a rocky valley that opened in the mountain, not far from the place of our camp, in the hope of finding water in some recess in the rocks. In this we encouraged them, and Alio went too. They were away some hours, and then they came back, yelling out, with a sort of mad joy, that they had found a water-hole with water in it. We immediately sent some men to fill all our empty skins, which were loaded on some of the animals. The water-hole was hidden in the stony bed of the Sardo torrent, and only eyes sharpened by thirst had succeeded in locating it. We remained for the rest of the day in a far more pleasant state of mind, for the finding of the water had made us confident again. I could even spare a pint of water for my little crocodile, which he enjoyed keenly. He had been wrapped in a wet rag in his tin, and was fed on bits of dried meat, which was moistened in water for him.

At seven o'clock in the evening we were once more on the move, climbing the Sardo Mountains; but our guide was not with us. We asked our men what had become of him. Most of them knew nothing, but a few said that he had gone away a few minutes before the caravan began to move. He had gone among the rocks of the Sardo Hills to look for water for himself, according to what he had said to one of the other men, and would join us later. He had casually given directions to this man as to the route we were to take, but whether by the fault of the intermediary or not, the directions were entirely meaningless.

We breasted the rise in the moonlight, and came amongst the crags. We had no landmark to guide us, nor was there any semblance of a path through the harsh basalt hills. Indeed, there had never been a path in the country since it came out of chaos. Still we proceeded on our way, buoyed up by the thought that at least we had left the desert behind. In these

rocky hills there was some likelihood of finding water from time to time, though, without a guide familiar with the country, the search for it would be anything but simple. Water was to be met with only in hollows in the rock. Most of these quickly become dry by evaporation, after the close of the rainy season, but a few are perennial. The water is consumed by the sun alone, as there are practically no animals in these barren lands. Some of these water-holes, or wells, although they have only a small orifice on the surface of the ground, are in reality great subterranean reservoirs. The difficulty is to find them, as they are invisible at a very short distance. Very few men know where they are, for the land is uninhabited, and there is an almost complete lack of even vegetable life. Such are the general conditions in Upper Danakil, though, as we shall see, it is just possible for human beings to exist in some parts of the country.

Filled with gloomy forebodings, we continued to move along a stony ravine, in the shadow cast by the moon. The only sound, besides the shuffling of the camels' feet, was the occasional voice of one of our men, calling the name of Alio. There was despair even in the tone of that voice, and in the echo which seemed to pass from crag to crag, until it was lost under the last unseen precipice. Alio did not answer.

After two more hours, we left the bed of the torrent, and moved to the left, towards the summit of a hill which we could now see in the moonlight. We intended to rejoin the torrent at the other side of the hill. When at last we had reached the summit, we were startled to see two forms which moved amongst the boulders. We could not tell whether they were men or wild animals, but they appeared to move quickly from rock to rock, as though taking cover. As we all stood with straining eyes, searching the elusive scene, Settie called out some friendly words. To our overwhelming joy the figures replied, for they were men. We found they were two Afars or Danakils, nomads, who said that they were travelling, driving some few goats of theirs in search of land not wholly

sterile, whereon they might turn their little flock to graze. They said that in their own place there was now no water, as even the largest water-holes were dry. We asked them whether they had seen anything of a man who had been our guide, and who carried the silver baton of the Anfari of the Aussa. They answered that they had encountered no one, but that, having heard the cries of our men, they had come to find out who we might be. On seeing such a large party of men, most of them foreigners, they had become alarmed.

We had come quite close to the place where these poor people had settled for the night, and, finding that we made no movement to do them harm, they now led us towards their camp. As we came to the opposite side of the hill, we saw, amongst the boulders, a small hut of the usual Danakil sort, pieces of matting thrown over an arch of bent sticks, four feet high. On being called by the men, two women put their heads out of the aperture which served as a door. The heads were followed by the upper part of their naked bodies, and resting their hands on the ground, their breasts almost touching the rock, they stayed there looking up in the dim light. These women were like two animals caught in their lair. Between some bigger rocks nearby, a camel was tied, and near him a few lean goats moved restlessly in a stone enclosure, a rough circular wall thrown up as a protection against beasts of prey.

We inquired of the elder of the savages as to whether there was a water-hole to be found towards the north, on our line of march. He replied that there was one at a few hours' distance, but he was evidently unwilling to accompany us to the place. It was clear that he was afraid of us, so we decided to give him time to get over his fright. We told him he had no reason to fear us, for the Anfari was our friend. It was only by the greatest good fortune that we had come across these two men in such a place. At last, Abdul Kader induced the old savage to conduct us to the water-hole of which he had spoken.

We descended the hill, and had been travelling for an hour when from a gully, at right-angles to our line of advance, Alio made his appearance. He joined us without speaking a word, as though nothing unusual had happened. We concluded that he had been watching us all the way along, and had purposely refrained from making any reply to the calls of our men. Perhaps he had hoped that we would turn back when we found ourselves without a guide. But seeing that his desertion had made no difference to our determination to advance, he had joined us again, doubtless realizing that, if any disaster overtook us, he would be made to pay dearly for it. For these people suppose that if a European meets his death in a strange country, sooner or later his comrades will come in force to avenge him. For this reason the Sultan of the Aussa would be careful to do his best to ensure our safety while in his dominions.

We said nothing to Alio, but rather ignored him. We either had to adopt this attitude, or sanction his death. There was more than one would-be executioner that night amongst our followers. But Alio was spared.

We kept on moving slowly amongst the rocks, scarcely ever placing a foot flat on the ground. Through gullies and natural corridors, and amongst great boulders, we continued to stumble in the still hot night. The moon touched the grim rocks with a weird elusive light, while the camels fell to their knees, and righted themselves again, and again lurched forward. At last we saw something glittering in the moonlight in front of us, and we could hardly believe our eyes. It was the wide surface of a sheet of water, like a great splash of silver amongst the dark rocks. Behind it rose a vertical wall of basalt, and large boulders surrounded it, for it lay in the bed of a torrent, the same Sardo watercourse which we had left a little time before. An immense feeling of relief descended on us as we beheld this sight.

I ran from boulder to boulder till I came to the water, when I immersed my head in it. The caravan was not far

behind me, and men and beasts were soon drinking their fill of the good water. We then unloaded the animals, and arranged our camp, and in a very short time we were asleep. There was no chattering of the servants this night. Exhaustion, and the terror inspired by the parched sterile country, had worn them out.

SEKKADAHARA TO GADDAEITA

WHEN day dawned, we found that near the water-hole, called Sekkadahara, at which we had encamped there were five small acacia trees. With a rope, we made a horizontal net in the tops of these trees, and this we covered with all the mats we could find. In this way, we made a good protection against the sun, far better than the low tent. Our mats purchased in the Aussa were made of reeds, and, when placed two or three thick, they made a good roof for this purpose.

On the crest of a hill we noticed a mass which struck us by its regularity. The old savage told us it was one of the Sultan's residences. It consisted of four stone walls without a roof. When it was desired to use it, mats were laid across the top, supported by wooden poles. This was one of the several occasional residences which are scattered over the Anfari's dominions. Once only had the present ruler's father used this primitive house, and he himself had never come here, or across the Kurub and Sardo deserts.

For many hours we drooped lifelessly in the furnace temperature, but evening came at last, bringing its longed-for shadow. The stones of the valley ceased to throw off their glare, while the direct reflection and reverberation of the heat ended too, for now we had to suffer only from that due to the radiation of what ground and rocks have stored since the first morn rose on the world — an infernal wealth of accumulated

heat which no gloom of night, no change of season, can mitigate beyond skin depth.

Losing no time now, we loaded a good supply of water, and proceeded with the other preparations for our departure. The old savage, who had guided us to the water-hole on the night before, still hung about our camp, never tired of looking and wondering at all he saw. All his life, probably, he had heard tales of white people. He had never felt quite convinced that they really existed. But now, at the end of his life, they had come to the very door of his hut, tired out and lost too, though evidently so immensely rich. And, so, he had had the strange experience of conducting these extraordinary beings to the water-hole.

While our men were loading the camels, I climbed on the basalt rock which overhung the pool. Here, I was perched about thirty feet above the surface of the water. Coveys of partridges, and flights of doves, fluttered hither and thither, disturbed at my sudden appearance. They had congregated in considerable numbers about the water.

We now set the caravan in motion, and climbed the slope of a hill. This was followed by more slopes, descending and ascending, where the ground was so rocky and difficult that our wailing camels fell, one after another, in some instances tearing the skin of their bodies on the sharp stones. Men fell too, cutting their knees and elbows. Rosina and Pastori both fell and hurt themselves, the former somewhat severely. As for myself, whenever I fell, I seemed by good fortune to come down on my hands, so that, though they were cut, I suffered no worse injury. The sharp-edged black basalt and lava seemed to have splintered like glass. Under the touch of our feet, it gave out a metallic tinkling. The obstacle it formed to our advance was as though shapeless masses of iron, mixed with spear-points, knives, and tooth-edged saws, had been thrown together in confusion, for the purpose of impeding us. We struggled along grimly, occasionally responding to a call for help when one of the camels had fallen, and had to

be re-loaded. For five hours, we crawled across the horrid scene of desolation, while the moon, sailing through thin clouds, seemed to watch us indifferently.

Presently we came to a dry torrent, set deeply in the mass of debris. It was called Gabala. For some time, we travelled along the bottom of this gully, while its steep sides echoed the tinkling noises and faint cries raised by our stumbling caravan. At last we climbed another hill, and came out on a level expanse of granite, which, though somewhat rough and intersected with crevices, seemed to us like a space artificially paved, after what we had already experienced. Here, except for the danger of falling into the crevices, we were opposed by no torturing obstacles.

After struggling on for another hour, our fatigue was such that we felt we could go no farther. The men were no longer in a close file, but were scattered here and there with the animals. They had to be constantly encouraged, and it was only the fear of being left behind in the hostile wilderness that induced them to make any effort to move at all. We halted on the granite tables, throwing ourselves down on our spread mattings.

Alio had said that in those hills there was water, and while the camels were being unloaded he went away to look for it. After a short time he returned, and said that there was no water, at least as far as he could see, for the moonlight was very faint. When day broke, we found ourselves in a dilemma. Should we remain where we were, and make a more thorough search for water, or should we push on while strength remained to us? We directed some of the men to load the animals, while the remainder went with Alio to search for the water. After being away some time, Alio's party came back with disastrous tidings. In every place in which water was most likely to be found, they had encountered nothing but a little dry caked mud.

The sun had not yet made its appearance above the horizon when we moved off, a dispirited Indian file of men and

animals, resuming a tremendous journey. With the prospect of another dry march, following the one we had already accomplished, we now had to treasure every drop of our water with the utmost parsimony. Everybody, on awakening from sleep, had found it necessary to wash and bandage some wound on knee or elbow. I was fortunate in only having suffered cuts on my palms and knuckles, but my strong Cuban boots were split, and the soles had become detached. I took a rope, and wound some ten yards of it round each of my feet, over the boots. Though this arrangement was clumsy, it saved me from walking barefoot.

All our men possessed sandals, and we had been wise in providing them each with an additional pair. Even Alio, and the two men we had met at Sardo, wore sandals to protect their feet from the cutting rocks and the terrible heat of this torturing ground.

We now descended from the granite outcrop, and came anew amidst the fragments and boulders, which for two days now we had struggled with. But, on creeping slowly and carefully out of a gully, we suddenly saw, far below us, a beautiful valley which wound its way, smooth and white, between the grim mountains. This was the valley of the Sekkadahara, a torrent, now dry, which we had already touched at its confluence with the Gabala. Had our guide really known the country, he might have led us down the Sekkadahara from the outset, instead of allowing us to undergo the tortures of crossing for two days the stony hills. He now told us that for more than ten years he had not been in these parts, and that only once in his life had he even been here at all. His remarks did not surprise us, for what was there in such places to induce even the wild animals of the desert to traverse them!

We still had a spell of hard labour to accomplish, before we could come to the ease of the valley beneath us, for the descent from the mountain was steep, and the way covered with crags and boulders. We made three unsuccessful attempts to descend, but finally we had to go further along the

mountain top, and at last, after four hours' hard work under the pitiless sun, we succeeded in getting our caravan to the smooth floor of the valley.

To the east rose the rugged and majestic Mount Iralala topped with spire-like crests. On the further side of it, unseen by us, were limitless deserts, and to its north a chain of volcanic cones rose one behind another. In a horse-shoe, described by the ridge of a part of the mountain from which we had just descended, we now beheld the tomb of a Danak chief. It would have been difficult to choose a place which conveyed a greater sense of awe. On the overhanging brink of the mountains which must have seen many men die of thirst, and others, perhaps, the victims of crime and treachery, was entombed this hero of a bloodthirsty race. The black pinnacles and glistening walls seemed like the realization of the dreams of one possessed, and all was as lifeless as the tomb which was enshrined there.

This memorial was built, not with branches of trees, but with stones, for here even such parched trees as grow in the open deserts were absent. Only heroes, valiant warriors, have conspicuous tombs erected over their remains. The unknown herd, who have lived their wretched lives guiltless of the notorious infamy which is the usual outcome of extraordinary ability in such a country, are buried in graves the faint sign of which are obliterated by the elements in a few short seasons. These last are rings of small stones, placed where the body lies buried.

The tombs of minor heroes are small stone towers, solidly built, shaped like a beacon. They stand ten or twelve feet high, and are circular, tapering slightly towards the top. Several of such towers are sometimes seen close together on the same hill, though the Danakils prefer to build the sepulchre of their great men in places where there are no other tombs as far as possible.

The tombs of the greatest chiefs are always built on the edge of a precipice, in a solitary place. They are of the usual

circular form, very massive, and thirty feet or more in diameter. They have a single small opening in one side, and, inside this outer ring, the truncated cone of the actual sepulchre is placed. Sometimes, before the entrance of the outer wall, a small dead tree is planted. This has to be carried from a distance, for nothing grows in the places where these tombs are situated. A circle of small stones is arranged around the base of the stem of the tree. On its branches are hung the trophies which the dead man removed in his lifetime from the bodies of his victims. In cases where these have been destroyed by the elements during the lapse of time, fragments of the skin of a leopard or other wild animal are frequently hung in their place.

It was not given to us to continue travelling long in the smooth Sakkadahara valley, for, being obliged to keep on a northerly bearing, we were soon faced with the necessity of climbing another steep boulder-strewn hill. Soon, all around us there was nothing but a chaos of boulders and stones and sharp volcanic rocks, all heaped together as if thrown in that place from above by colossal giants. This was the third day we had crept amongst the horrid stones: it was also our second day without coming to water. An uneasiness, amounting to terror, would at times seize me as I stumbled along in the blazing heat. Sometimes, two cyclopean masses of rock lay close together with a small gap between them, and to save ourselves the fatigue of making a long detour, we would attempt to make the camels pass through the narrow place. Here the loads sometimes became wedged into the narrow way, or would be made so insecure, by coming into violent contact with the rocks, that they would have to be adjusted anew. At other times, round stones rolled and slipped under the animals' feet, and frequently brought them to the ground. We felt ourselves to be as ants which labour through the gravel in the dry bed of a torrent. Apart from the tortures of thirst, and of the harassing ground, our animals had eaten no food for three days. There was no alternative but to go on.

At noon we arrived exhausted at a torrent-bed, where four small dry trees stood like skeletons upreared against the yellow sky. Here we halted, and served water out to the men. Our position now was such that it would have been impossible for us to return to the last water-hole, which we had passed two days before, at Spider-web Camp. Our remaining water was insufficient to sustain us for such a distance. Alio now scarcely answered when he was addressed. It seemed that the mission of the lugubrious bearer of the Silver Baton was to lead us to a place where death would put an end to our troubles.

The unemptied goatskins were placed on mattings, spread on the ground, as a protection against the sharp stones. We also had them covered with matting and sacks, so as to diminish the loss by evaporation.³ Yet the skins continually exuded moisture, which soaked into the sacks under them. From time to time, some of our men threw themselves on the ground, and chewed and sucked the protruding corners of the wet sacks. When the temperature rises to 158°F. in the shade, your throat is apt to become parched, and involuntarily you begin an endless mental calculation as to how long your water may be expected to last, dividing its volume again and again by the number of men. On this background, every now and then, a picture intrudes of yourself and your companions fighting desperately to gain possession of the last draught of life-sustaining water. Some of our men lurked continually about the heap of goatskin bags. They moved warily, like wild animals not yet goaded by their needs to the point of overcoming all their fears. They were getting perilously close to that reckless state, though. Now and then Pastori, Rosina, or I would pick up a rifle casually, and handle it, trying the bolt. It was desirable to keep present in the minds of thoughtless people a respect for powder and shot, a persuasion of the wisdom of discipline.

Dimsa had been out with some of the others, searching for signs of spiky pasturage for the animals. He returned later than the rest, and coming into the shadow of our improvised

tent, he knelt down and proceeded to unwind the cloths which he had swathed about his head and neck as a protection against the sun. The poor fellow was overheated and exhausted, and his head hung drooping on his breast. Like the rest of our Plateau men, taken from his cool uplands and plunged into the Danakil furnace, he suffered severely. He had lost his small kidskin water-bag in a fall on the previous night. Each of our men was supplied with one of these waterskins, so that he might drink his allowance of water drop by drop on the march. Without this constant moistening of his parched palate, man, in this murderous heat, is like a stranded fish, drying in the sun. Dimsa had suffered severely since the loss of his waterskin, and had only been sustained by the charitable sips of water allowed him by the rest of us. We now gave him a new waterskin, but he put it aside with a gesture of resignation. 'Keep the water for me,' said he, 'and dole it out to me in little drops, for my thirst is too great to allow me to measure it out.' Thereupon he threw himself on the ground and began to suck the wet sacks. We poured him out half a canful of water, wringing the last drops out of the empty goatskin. The liquid treasure was foul-smelling and dirty. Dimsa drank the whole greedily in one draught, and it seemed to those who watched him that he was like a man on the verge of ruin, flinging away the remaining shreds of his wealth in a last wild orgy. Instead of consuming his water in sips, he had drunk a fourth part of his day's supply at one draught. On reading amazement at his folly in every face, the poor fellow's chagrin was painful to see. That half-canful of water was to have been sipped at intervals as infrequent as endurance and will-power could possibly make them. 'Take heart, Dimsa,' I said, 'that drink was bakshish (a free gift).' The young man, with amazed eyes, repeated 'Bakshish! Bakshish!' and threw himself at my feet. Then he rose and uncovered his head, taking off all the swathing cloths, lifting them like a hat, in order to acknowledge his gratitude. He walked backwards to the shady place where his friends were sheltering, bowing to us as he went, and whispering his thanks.

Whenever the two mules saw men handling the water-skins, they grew restless, and began to grumble and mutter. Also, if one of us walked near the place where they were tethered, their lips would quiver, and they would speak to him, uttering sounds such as they were never known to make before. It was the voice of creatures appealing for help.

When evening came, we made preparations to leave. The men suffering from sunstroke were obliged to walk, for the camels had been wearied almost to the point of death by their struggles in crossing the rough, sharp, and stony hills during the last three days. Had their loads not been lightened by the weight of the water we had consumed, very few of them would have been in a condition to go any distance. The two mules were too weak to be loaded at all, and their famished condition was such that we decided to pour them out a little water to drink. Neither the mules nor the camels had had anything to eat for some days.

On giving Alio his share of water, to store in his kidskin for the march, we were met with remonstrances, and a face more surly than ever. In a few moments, Abdul Kader came to say that Alio had told him to tell us that he wanted more water than we were prepared to give him, and that he was going on ahead in order to look for water for his own use. We replied that it was through Alio's incompetence that we had had to endure so many waterless marches, and that he was fortunate in being allotted the same quantity of water as the other men had. Alio replied that he was not our servant, and that he did not intend to die of thirst in order to accompany us: he was free, and could go whithersoever he wished. We informed him that he was mistaken, that, since the camels could not travel fast over the boulder-strewn ground, he must moderate his pace to theirs; every member of the caravan must keep close to the others; as for him, if he attempted to leave, he would be shot then and there.

We were alarmed to realize that we had probably lost our way: had we come to the known water-holes we should still have felt confident, even though they had proved to be dry.

It would have been foolhardy to search for unknown water-holes at this still-dry season of the year.

Rosina, the quietest man among us, now took his rifle and commanded Wolde Jesus to do the same. The two then kept Alio covered with their weapons. The remainder of our men also kept an eye on the baton-carrier while they were loading the animals. When at last we moved away, the sullen guide was entirely surrounded by armed men. We forbore from proceeding to the extreme measure of manacling him, as such treatment would have shamed him to such an extent that he would have preferred to die of thirst himself, rather than direct us in the right way, supposing that he should presently recognize landmarks familiar to him.

We issued from a rocky valley, and proceeded to climb the step-like edge of a lava field. There was no sign of vegetation anywhere: all was bare rock. At the sight of that new scene of desolation, continuing beyond the range of vision, our hearts sank: our quest for water seemed hopeless. Weary and discouraged, we were pressing mechanically onwards when, after several hours of such torture, to our infinite joy, we suddenly chanced to come upon a group of living creatures. They were four women and some little donkeys. We could scarcely believe the evidence of our eyes, but thought this must be some mirage, the effect of our physical weakness. We rushed towards them, and it came as an immense surprise to us to hear them speak. They told us they were travelling to the Aussa, for the drought had killed their cattle, and they had feared it would kill them too. We assured them that we had no intention of doing them harm. Their presence there, poor creatures as they were, was a blessing to us, giving us new courage, and the hope of finding a way out of all our difficulties. They were a visible sign that it was possible to live and move about even in such an utterly desolate part of the earth as we were then in.

In reply to our eager questions, the poor women, who seemed as much taken by surprise as we were (it was the first

time in their lives they had beheld white men), informed us that there was a large water-hole in a rocky basin ahead of us. We took flour from the satchels of our boys and gave it to them, intending to recompense our men when we had leisure to unload the camels. We then resumed the march. All were happy and lighthearted now, and bursts of singing broke out along the length of the caravan, a sound we had not heard for many a day. Even the camels went forward with a more buoyant step, and the mules, weakened to the point of exhaustion, as they were, pushed on ahead of their own accord, and showed us the way. I had noticed, when we stopped to speak with the Danakil women, that the mules had smelt continually the lips of the donkeys, and I am convinced they had discovered that they had recently drunk. It had seemed indeed that they were intelligently communing with one another. The two animals, who hitherto had trailed along in the wake of the caravan, now quickly outdistanced the camels. Unmistakably they were tracing back, by the help of their sense of smell, the trail left by the donkeys.

So evident to all was the happiness of all the animals after our meeting with the women and their donkeys that on the morrow, when I was writing in my journal, Rosina came and said that it would be a point worth recording how the animals had suddenly seemed to find new life after the unexpected meeting. We had not spoken of this before, and he now told me that in all his wandering years he had never observed such a phenomenon until that moment. We agreed that the donkeys and our own animals must have spoken together, in some way of their own. When Rosina had finished speaking, I turned back the page of my journal, and read out to him what I had written on the subject. It was exactly what he had said, almost word for word.

We now pursued our way, with the revived feeling that we were indeed masters of our fate, and soon, to increase our confidence, we met a group of two men and a woman, with three camels. This was the main body of the party, for they

told us they had sent ahead the four women we had previously come across, as a sign to those they might meet that they came in peace, for such is the custom of the country. We exchanged bits of news with these people, and then passed on.

The soil became less rocky, and thus facilitated our rapid march to the water. Soon, to our inexpressible relief, we came to expanses of sand and hardened clay. The men sang aloud their praises to God.

Now that the caravan might confidently be expected to travel without accidents, Pastori and I decided to leave it and press on after the mules. In two more hours we came to the water, which lay, muddy and putrid, in a basin some fifteen feet wide. We plunged our heads into it, and then drank with the mules, resting on our hands at the brink. The mules, without raising their muzzles, remained drinking longer than I had ever seen animals drink before.

The water-hole was situated amidst rugged volcanic rocks, and into it the rare rain-water drained from a considerable area. We decided to remain there a full day, in order to recruit the strength of men and animals a little, after the exertions of the past few days.

Alio had readjusted his notions as to our position after the meeting with the four women, and the mules had superseded him as our guides. While awaiting the arrival of the caravan, Pastori and I selected a suitable place for our camp. We chose a spot where some clay, brought down by the rains, had made a smooth place. Here the animals might lie down, and rest comfortably, after their long experience of rough and jagged stones. Half a dozen thorn-bushes grew close at hand, and these would provide firewood. Though it was still night, we looked forward to a meal of tea and coffee, unleavened bread, and dried meat. Our new-found energy and lightheartedness, on finding water, had given us a ravenous appetite.

The caravan arrived, the men singing with happiness. Only our four sick men were silent. We had them placed in a good position, side by side, while the rest proceeded, with lively

chatter, such as we had not heard for many days, to unload the beasts.

Our worst case of sickness was Osman. With blood coming from his mouth, he seemed every hour to be on the point of death. The poor slave was the only man we could permit to ride a camel, and he had to be tied to the saddle, for he possessed no strength. It had frequently happened in the past marches that he, with his camel, had fallen, and rolled amongst the rough boulders, or become fixed between two rocks. He had looked an unusually strong man when we had engaged him at Awash Station, on the day we set out. That fine colour of his, a dull sooty blackness, had now faded. His ashen hue, his prominent cheek-bones, and sunken cheeks, his great bewildered eyes, all seemed to attest that his end was very near. He had now become delirious with fever, and his ceaseless wailing, interspersed with sudden yells, broke the lofty silence of the night, and cast on all a dreadful fear. Every new wail of agony brought us fresh realization of the precariousness of the situation in which we all were. In the stillness of the night, which shrouded this forbidden land, the incoherent mutterings and wild cries of Osman frayed our nerves almost to breaking point.

We no longer heard the shrieks of wild animals. Not even a hyena, or a jackal, added his scream to the wailing of Osman. Amongst these arid stones there was no sign of life, with the single exception of the desert partridges, which after sundown had come to drink at the pool.

GADDAEITA TO GALEIE

WE were awakened at dawn by the cries of partridges, and the hissing of snakes. At sunset the birds come in great flights to the water-hole, where they drink, and pass the night. They are sometimes of assistance to a caravan, as they indicate, by the direction of their evening flight, the position of a water-hole. At dawn, they fly away to their feeding-grounds. By day, only the snakes remain, lying close in the humid crevices around the water-hole. At sunset, the reptiles creep out of their hiding-places, and prepare to prey upon the birds as they alight to drink. At night, the despairing cries of the victims, and the mad flapping of their wings, are continually heard. When the partridges are cackling in flocks about the water, at the close of the day, the rapidly uttered *glew . . . glew . . . glew* of the snakes becomes audible. It is a sound which seems to pierce through all other noises like the point of a spear. When daylight is shed over the world, silence descends with it. The snakes retire to their slimy holes, and the last flights of the partridges are lost to sight over the horizon.

We set up our tent, and prepared to pass the daylight hours beside the pool. The sun rose fast, and soon, all about us, the heat began to grow, as though the earth were catching fire. Within one hour after the first appearance of the sun, our daily martyrdom had begun. The haze, and the dazzling light, seemed to make our eyes grow dim; our nostrils became dry,

and a dizziness filled our heads. Each man swathed his head and neck with many cloths, and when an order had to be issued, it was given and acknowledged by signs. We passed the day in semi-torpor, occasionally doing something to try to relieve Osman, who seemed ever on the point of death.

At last the afternoon grew advanced, and we began to load the animals. In the middle of this, a quarrel broke out between Pastori and Alio. The hard conditions under which we were living had strained the nerves of all, and one was easily provoked to anger. There was no doubt that Alio was of a treacherous nature, and we should have rid ourselves of his presence long since but for the fact that he had travelled in these parts ten years before, and might still be of some use to us, though his record so far had made this appear unlikely. We were so entirely ignorant of the country ourselves that we dared not cut ourselves off from even the most doubtful hope of obtaining assistance. What gave rise to the quarrel was Alio's continued sullenness, which appeared already to have been the cause of unnecessary hardship and delay to every member of the caravan.

Pastori had seized a rifle, and Alio was making off again, when our Danakils rushed after the latter, and held him. Others of our men threw themselves on their knees in front of Pastori, and Rosina, and me, and begged us to take heed that blood was not shed. After a few minutes, tranquillity was restored, and the interpreter, instructed by us, gave Alio to understand that discipline would be imposed on him in the same measure as upon all the rest, and that, on pain of being shot, he was on no account to leave the caravan at any time, unless ordered to do so.

The storm having subsided, we ordered coffee to be made and served out to all the men, including Alio. The latter was presently seen to be lending a hand to the others in loading the camels, work which he had never before condescended to perform.

A little later, I saw Alio take a bucket, and go to the pool

to wash himself. Instead of wading into the water and stirring up the mud, in the usual thoughtless Danakil style, he filled the bucket, and took it a little apart from the pool, and there washed himself. This was a most unusual thing for a Danakil to do, and it was evident that Alio was doing it in order to propitiate us. I appreciated his intention exceedingly, and in order to show my approval I took some native tobacco and rolled a couple of cigarettes, which I presented to him. Smoking is almost unknown amongst the Danakils, but Alio accepted the cigarettes respectfully.

After taking a bath, I had left my sun-helmet and some other clothes on a rock while I went to assist in loading the camels. A little later I returned to take up these things, and on lifting my sun-helmet, to put it on my head, I was startled by seeing a small snake fall out of it. I saw that it was one of the serpents called Cleopatra's asps, a poisonous snake. I struck at the reptile with my staff, but it quickly disappeared amongst the rocks. Seeing me flogging the stones, Pastori and Alio came running to find out what the reason for it was. When I explained to them what had happened, and that I had almost put on my helmet with the asp in it, Alio showed his pleasure at my lucky escape with many awful grimaces and friendly grins.

Just as we were leaving the Gaddaeita water-hole, the moon rose, and we saw the flocks of partridges sitting on the rocks. The sharp noise of the snakes was audible above their cackling. Some of the exhausted peaceless birds, dizzy with thirst and fatigue, seemed to fly about at random, colliding with the contorted branches of the thorn-bushes, and dropping dazed on the rocks beneath. I was so touched by the sight that, though we were short of food, I had not the heart to pick up any of the fallen birds.

We proceeded on our way through a valley so narrow that the moon illuminated only the upper edge of one side. Instead of the dead silence of our last marches, the night was now filled with cheerful voices. The volcanic walls of the nar-

row ravine echoed these sounds, as though in anger at our foreign voices troubling the primeval quietude of the place. Presently, the moon showed itself over the hill, and then the camel men began to render the guttural chants with which they urge their beasts forward at night. Those raucous brayings had not risen in the caravan even when we had met the four women and their donkeys. Now they gave confidence to our fellows, and all were filled with a contagious happiness.

Alio after some hesitation began to explain to us, as we marched along, that he had not intentionally missed the water-holes which we had expected to find. He had actually lost his way, and becoming fearful that he might die of thirst if he continued to keep with the slow camels, he had taken upon himself to go on alone. He still appeared to have no scruple about leaving us to die in the desert: the thought simply did not occur to him, as far as I could make out. Alio assured us that he now knew where we were, and that he could see the water-holes ahead 'like desert partridges.'

All this made for contentment, for the human mind inclines to optimism, as the sparks fly upwards. The ravine now opened out, and though still rocky, became smoother, so that our progress was easier still. The basalt wall to our right had changed to low rounded hillocks, and in front of us we could see, in the bright moonlight, part of the rim of volcanic hills that encircled the level ground on which we were travelling. Having crossed this rim, we found ourselves again in the midst of rocks, which shone with a metallic lustre in the moonlight. Presently we entered another ravine, and, on issuing from the further extremity of this, we beheld a most extraordinary sight.

Below us lay a white and shining expanse, like an immense sheet of alabaster, rimmed by a vast circle of black volcanic hills. It was an enormous crater, the level bottom of which was covered with fine sand.

We descended to that lunar landscape through a dark ravine, and the aspect of the whole seemed totally different to

anything else on the earth. We felt our way carefully yet, in the rockiness of the entrance, but soon reached the smooth plain, where our feet seemed to tread on a layer of freshly fallen snow. We dispersed on that silken floor, spread ourselves abroad as though we had suddenly been freed from a prison. As the string of camels came out of the ravine into the shining plain, even Osman suppressed his groaning, at sight of the wonderful spectacle.

Walking had become effortless: we seemed to be moving on air. When we had outdistanced the caravan, we turned to look for it, and saw it like a black snake crawling over the white earth. We and our animals were the only living things to be seen in that beautiful but utterly sterile site. We felt thankful that it was night, for by day such a place would have been a veritable inferno.

We marched directly on the Pole Star, and reached the rim of the crater, where the soft ground came to an abrupt end. We found a crevice in the steep black rocks, and made our way into it. From the vertical sides great rocks overhung our heads, and seemed as though they might fall and crush us at any moment; and every fissure in the rim was visible against the background of the moon's halo. The bottom of the ravine was so heaped with ancient boulders that, on looking at them, one could almost hear a faint echo of the thunderous sounds of volcanic eruption. The camels groaned and grumbled amongst these stones, but not for long, for we soon came to another and larger crater, similar to the first one in every respect save size. There was the same wide expanse, white, and soft to the tread, surrounded by the same rim of black hills.

We crossed this second crater at a good pace, and came again to an opening, this time a broad valley. We found it best to keep to the right-hand side under a steep wall, so as to avoid the many boulders which lay strewn about. Presently, we left this valley, and came to a place where thorn bushes grew sparsely. The rocks were heaped together, leaving spaces

of unencumbered earth between the heaps. We found also small tufts of coarse grass, like the backs of hedgehogs, and the Danakils with us ran to these and examined them, in order to discover whether they bore any fresh shoots, for this would be a sign that rain had fallen recently, and in that case it would be worth our while to search for water in that place. But the grass tufts were found to be dry and withered. We continued on our way, and soon found ourselves in a narrow ravine. On leaving this, we found, to our astonishment, that we had come out on the floor of a third crater. It was not so perfect as the others we had already passed through, but it was very much larger than either of them. Alio informed us that these craters were known as Hariri.

We saw what appeared to be part of the rim in front of us, but, as we still marched on the Pole Star, we presently came to this high ground, and found that it was a long series of basalt hillocks extending in a straight line to the north. Beginning at the centre of the crater, it extended to the circumference at a point opposite to that by which we had entered.

At this central point we halted, and waited for the camels to come up. We had been marching continuously for five hours, and were feeling somewhat fatigued.

Under the hill nearest to us there was a tomb, which appeared to have been constructed with great care. After our progress through the three craters, where there was not the faintest sign of any living inhabitant, it came almost as a shock to us to find an elaborate sepulchre in such a place. The memorial had been erected to one Datoma Alidas, a chief whose name had been given to the locality also.

The camels came up, and we resumed our march with them over the opalescent ground, the paleness of which frequently made us think of frost and snow. We were all nearing the point of breaking down. As for me, it was with the utmost difficulty that I managed to keep my eyes more or less open. If one of our number stretched himself on the ground, in order to get a few moments' rest, he could hardly be got on his feet

again. Only the rank fear of being left behind in the empty wilderness made such a one stagger after the reeling caravan and catch desperately at a rope hanging from the saddle of the last camel.

Alio assured us that we should find water in a valley below the opposite rim of the crater. He now remembered the locality, he said, and this was an inexpressible comfort to us.

We came amongst some scattered stones, which marked the beginning of the crater's rim, and crossing a dry torrent, we climbed to the top of a range of hills. From this elevation, we could see much of the form of the crater, and the line of hills describing the radius from the centre to the circumference at one point. It was like the enormous white face of some cyclopean clock, with only one hand. After taking a last look at the extraordinary scene, we pursued our way round a domed hill-ock, till we saw from the opposite side a pale-hued plain stretching into the distance beyond the range of vision. It lay some six hundred feet below us. To our left, the rocky eminence on which we were standing was severed by a ravine, which carried the torrent we had already crossed higher up. It was there that we expected to find water, if any existed in the vicinity.

The descent was extremely difficult, for the slope dropped sheer down to the plain below, at a perilous angle. Some of the camels refused to proceed until we had unloaded them, and even the mules stopped frequently, in order to consider where they should place their feet next.

On reaching the plain, we decided to make our camp where the ravine debouched. All the animals, save two, had arrived there in safety. The missing camels were the one on which Osman was riding, and one which was led by a friend of Osman. The latter person was in the habit of assisting his sick comrade on the march, and always marched close to him.

We unloaded the animals, and in about half an hour Wolde Jesus, who had been attending to the mules, came to tell us that, after unsaddling them, he had followed them upstream,

where they had found an abundant supply of water close at hand. On hearing this, we felt free of all care, and composed ourselves to rest. But, although all the men and animals slept soundly, and the peaceful silence was unbroken, I found it impossible to sleep. If I sank into a momentary doze, I woke almost immediately, and found myself bathed in perspiration. Lying there, I watched every inch of progress made by the shadow, which slowly climbed the lofty precipice as the moon sank westward. After many hours, I was startled from a doze by the noise of footsteps and rolling stones. I jumped to my feet. Doubtless these were camels approaching, but they were coming down the ravine. How had they managed to descend the precipice there, while we others had come down the easier descent to the plain with the greatest difficulty? They soon made their appearance, and I found that they were indeed our two missing camels, with Osman and his companion. We were amazed to see them. One of the camels had a broken leg, which he trailed pitifully behind him. Osman, tied to the saddle, was more dead than alive, after his terrible jolting. It was a miraculous return. Some of the other men woke, and got up to help the wanderers, but very few words were exchanged, for everybody was exhausted, and in no condition to appreciate misery or marvels.

We were awakened by the sun next morning, and proceeded without delay to the water-hole. I noticed that the strain and exhaustion of the last days had altered the very traits of Rosina's face, and the same thing had happened to some of the men. In fact, the only creature among us who seemed to be in perfect health and condition was my baby crocodile. In order to rest and recruit our strength, we decided to remain that day at Galeie, the place where we were encamped. In the morning, Pastori and I climbed to the top of an eminence in order to view the surrounding country, and continue my usual survey. Thereafter we all lay under shelters, which our men had rigged between the boulders. Nobody had much inclination to eat. Our food generally

consisted of boiled rice, seasoned with a little olive oil, followed by tea or coffee, and barguta bread. When there was a fire, we had some of the barguta crusts baked, enough to last for several days. In order to eat these crusts, we soaked them in our unclean water, and then sprinkled them with olive oil, salt, and pepper. But at the stage of our journey which I am now describing, we could not have eaten much of whatever fare had been at our disposal.

In the evening, while the camels were being loaded, I had a delightful swim in the pool, for the water-skins had all been filled. The water felt unusually cool, for the pool lay deep in the narrow ravine where the direct sunlight reached it only for a short time each day. The pool itself was also deep. Above it, the overhanging walls showed the colourings of metallic compounds, and great caves appeared in them here and there. Some of these last had been used as dens by wild animals, for they contained complete skeletons. But they must have been driven there by storms, or some other natural disturbance, for although there was water, there was no food, either for vegetarian or for carnivorous animals. They had died of starvation, those of them that had survived the terrible hungry fight for life among themselves.

There was not a blade of grass nor a leaf to be seen in that place, but at sunset a few partridges perched on the rocks, and presently fluttered down to the water. Then serpents crawled out of the cool fissures, and their whistling broke the eerie silence.

On returning to our camp, I found that the loading operations had been suspended, because two camels were discovered to be missing, together with the three men whom we had engaged at the Aussa. Some of the men had gone to look for the missing ones, in the great plain to the northward. The camels could only have gone in that direction, it was thought, for they would be unlikely to face the terrible ascent of the precipice. At nightfall some of the searchers had returned, but others were still out, so we were obliged to remain where we

were. At dawn, Pastori and I climbed to the top of a hill, but we could see no sign of what we sought.

We took up our quarters in one of the caves, and it was a great relief to be able to discard our sun-helmets. Usually, even when in our tent, we had to wear the heavy headgear from the first moment of the sun's appearance to the moment of its setting. We had matting spread on the floor of our cave, and sat there in comparative comfort, while our boys mended our clothes and boots.

We had decided that at sunset we would leave, even though the missing men and animals had not returned. The moon was favourable to night marching at this time, and we desired to take the fullest advantage of it. The afternoon was advanced, and we had already given orders to load, when Settie came to the cave to tell us delightedly that the camels had been found, and that they were in camp, together with the three Aussans and Alio, who had gone to look for them.

The three Aussans had remained out all those hours, looking for the strayed animals, without any food, and with little water. This was yet another proof of the great endurance of these people, and also of their faithfulness when justly treated. We realized, with pleasure, that the earnest attention to duty shown by these men was a proof that they conceived a spirit of loyalty and attachment to us. We felt that a spirit of co-operation had now grown up between the members of our caravan. Even Alio had assisted in the search for the lost animals, and complete harmony seemed at last to exist in the little party of human beings crawling painfully through the grim deserts. This consideration at once reduced the anticipated horrors of the enterprise, and confidence returned to us in full.

The three Aussans told us they had found the camels at a water-hole distant some hours' journey ahead. This was a happy circumstance. We were sure, then, of finding water at the end of our march.

DISAPPEARANCE OF MORDOFA

WE struck out into the plain northward, keeping parallel to the Datoma Alidas Hill, which lay on our right. This long range cuts the plain in two: to westward of it lies the Gwia, on which we were marching, and to eastward the Falal. Alio told us of a water-hole called Sigarita in the Datoma Alidas Hill, but we preferred to march on to the water which the strayed camels had found, not only because it was farther north, but because there was vegetation there.

As we advanced, we saw the outline of Mount Assa, clearly defined in the moonlight. It lay at some distance across the plain, to our left. After marching for three hours, we came to a place which greeted us with a wonderful perfume of jasmine. We also saw a group of large acacias, massed together, and although the ground was strewn with cobbles, it was evident that there was water at hand. We arrived at a slight depression, which marked the passage of a torrent called Gwia. Here, after the easiest march we had known for many days, we unloaded the animals in a miniature oasis.

On the morrow, we decided to remain at the Gwia for that day, as there were bushes and vines on which the animals could feed. The place was a striking example of how an arid and stony soil will support vegetation, provided there is subterranean moisture to nourish the roots. The contents of the water-hole were putrid, and only possible to be drunk by ani-

mals. We determined to search for better water at the foot of the Assa mountains, whence the Gwia torrent issued, and were, in fact, fortunate enough to find a good well in a deep recess there.

The Datoma Alidas Hill came to an end here, and on climbing it I found that it terminated in large round steps, each upper one of which stopped a little short of the one below it, just as the molten lava, spreading out fanwise, had thickened and come to a standstill. To the north of this terminal point of the hill, lay the Gohoi plain, broken on its eastern side by five parallel tongues of lava. North of these lay the Hela chain, with its pointed crests. To the left, north of Mount Assa, Mount Askoli lay east and west. The names of these features were given to me by Alio, who was becoming every day more useful and willing.

From a ravine between Mounts Assa and Askoli, a water-course, now dry, issued. On coming to the plain, this water-course divided; one branch, the Gwia, turning south-east, and the other, the Assa, turning north-east. Here and there, basalt outcrops showed black on the white Gohoi plain.

When I descended from the hill, I found that four natives had made their appearance in our camp. The eldest of them told us that one more march would bring us to the boundary between the Aussan Sultanate and that of Biru. He advised us to secure local men as guides in the Biru Sultanate. Alio displayed his Silver Baton before these men, and they immediately bowed and saluted before it. Our Aussan guide agreed that it would be wise to secure the services of a local guide, and added that although he had practically discharged the duties entrusted to him, he wished to accompany us still, until such time as he should see us delivered 'into big hands,' as his Sultan had commanded him.

One of the group of visitors now came forward and offered to act as our guide. He was, we learnt, a petty chief, and was something of a dandy. Small, lithe, agile, he carried his rifle in the peculiar manner invariably practised in this part of

the world, with either lance or rifle. It rested horizontally across his shoulders, at the back of his neck, and was held by the stock with one hand, and by the muzzle with the other, so that the man's arms were held away from his body. This was to facilitate the free circulation of air under the arms, for in this torrid climate the contact of the limbs with the body is avoided as much as possible. His left hand, as is also the invariable practice, clutched a kidskin, from which to sip now and then a few drops of water, to keep alive. Over the chief's breast hung a leopard skin, and he wore a loin-cloth, and a Danakil knife. The sign of his foppishness was a red kerchief tied round his head, and he moved with a jaunty air, as befitting his pretensions. He informed me that he would be ready to join us on the morrow, for to-day he must attend a tribunal in his distant village, concerning the matter of some stolen goats. Presently they all left us hurriedly, as a furious storm came over the steeple-points of the Hela. In a few minutes lightning was rending the leaden sky, and thunder roaring all around us, as though the spent volcanic country was to be split up and pounded into yet another shape.

The trees, around which we had encamped, whipped one another in the wind: branches were broken, and leaves plucked off and carried away horizontally through the air, like thrown stones. From the loftier boughs, which the camels had been unable to reach, bitter-sweet berries fell. We gathered these, and ate them: they were like hard and very poor cherries, but they were fruit. We piled all our baggage and saddles together, and covered them with matting and sacks, placing large stones to hold down the coverings. Sheets of water fell on the Gohoi plain, and the air quickly grew cooler. It was pleasant to feel that new freshness in the atmosphere, and even to feel that our clothes would soon be soaked with the downpour. But in the end no rain fell on us, as the clouds broke, and dispersed away from our vicinity. Far on the plain the wet basalt outcrops were black and shining, and the marks of the torrents in the grey soil showed like scratches in the lugubrious landscape.

Evening came, and again a camel was missing. It was not the fault of the men, for the hunger, fatigue, and restlessness of the animals made them wander about ceaselessly in search of less hard conditions of life. When the men who had been out watching over the grazing animals returned to camp, it was found that Mordofa, one of their number, was missing. This was indeed a sad and more serious matter. We immediately ordered large fires to be lighted on the Datoma Alidas Hill, and told our men to call out at intervals during the night. We also fired several rifle-shots, in order to indicate to the lost man the position of our camp, but there was no response.

The next morning we organized a systematic search, each European of us leading a party of our men in a different direction. We had agreed to foregather again in camp at noon. We reconnoitred during the whole of the morning, at a temperature of 158° F., but without success. The new guide made his appearance in the afternoon, but we delayed our departure until sunset, in the hope that Mordofa would return. To our sorrow, he did not return, and as evening was approaching, we decided to leave. We held no illusions as to the fate of the unfortunate fellow. The camel had doubtless been stalked and stolen, and probably Mordofa, when he had noticed its absence, had gone off alone to look for it. In this situation, he had been speared by some Danakil in the open desert. The poor man had not even had with him a rifle, with which he might have fired a shot to warn us of his danger.

Mordofa was a pleasant fellow, always bright, quiet, and gentle-mannered. He had never once had to be reprimanded throughout the course of our journey. It was evidently fated that our best men should meet with disaster: Bayonna, Makonnen, and now Mordofa.

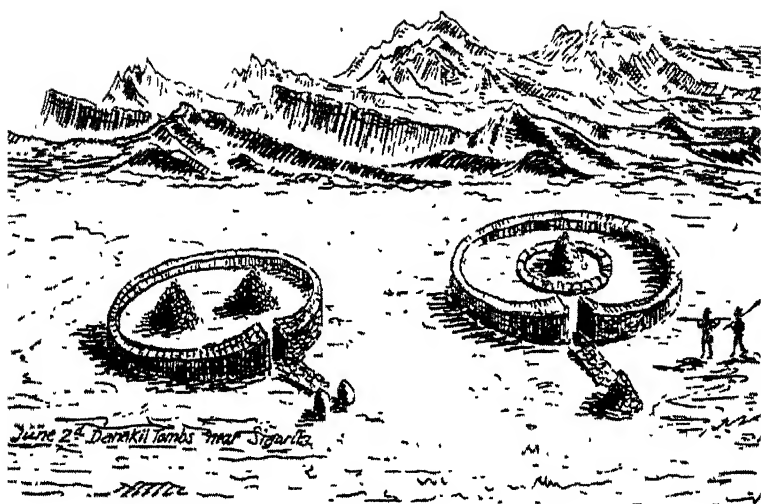
Sad and depressed, we abandoned the group of trees at Gwia, leaving the cobbles for the sandy expanse of the Gohoi plain. Before us, the jagged crests of Hela were illuminated by the red light of the setting sun, and the clouds above them

centre of the Gohoi, and came to a long outcrop of basalt. On the top of this, silhouetted against the distant Hela, there stood twelve tomb-turrets. Our new guide informed us that four of these, which were grouped together, marked the graves of four men who had been sentenced to determine, by ordeal of combat, who was the rightful possessor of something to which they all laid claim. The terrible fight ended in general carnage, for they all fell dead, or mortally wounded, and were buried under the four turrets which we saw before us.

The moon rose, and we increased our pace, following downstream, and sometimes crossing, the shallow torrent-bed. We skirted another large volcanic outcrop, at the base of which there were stone cattle-enclosures. Herds of goats were probably driven to the district in the season when the spiny grass springs. Farther ahead, we saw low circles of stones, marking the burial places of the lowly nomads. We halted where the dry torrent entered a ravine, that clove a range of hills bounding the Gohoi plain on the north. The place was called Galaito, and was situated on the frontier of the Aussan Sultanate. We had spent eleven days, full of formidable trials, in travelling from Aroberifaghe to this spot.

When dawn broke we noted with relief that a few thorny trees dotted the dreary landscape. Our animals would not be quite without food. We planned to resume our journey at sunset, for the moon was at this time still in a phase favourable to night journeying. When there was no moon, we were obliged to make two marches each day, one during the first hours following daybreak, and the other just before and after sunset. Under this system we were often caught by the burning sun, or the darkness, and obliged to camp at unsuitable places.

Settie and Alio came back from their search, and informed us that there were several small water-holes in the ravine. They were no bigger than a hat, and each held a few pints of water, but by the exercise of patience we procured enough water for all, for when the holes had been emptied they slowly



ANNULAR TOMBS NEAR SIGARITA



TURRET TOMBS NEAR GWIA

filled again. All the camels and the mules eventually drank to satiety.

We had carried from our former camp a good supply of dry wood, gathered from the acacia trees, and were thus enabled to make a fire and bake bread.

Under the tremendous wall of the ravine, we found a small cave, where Pastori, Rosina, and I spent the infernal hours while the sun rose to the zenith. When, after noon, the direct rays penetrated into our place of refuge, we moved across to the other side of the ravine where there was another cave.

In the afternoon, three women came to load water, and on the towering rim high above our heads a few men were seen watching us. We told Abdul Kader to open the box, and get out some strings of beads for these folk. Then we made signs to the men on the brink of the chasm to come down. They soon understood our meaning, and appeared happy at finding that we did not seek to harm them.

When the hour of loading the animals arrived, Pastori and I climbed a hill to the east of the ravine, and from that elevated point saw, for the first time, the squat dome of the Afdera Mountain, an extinct volcano. An odd feature about the landscape was that everywhere there were wedge-shaped hills. It was as though the district had been floored with colossal bricks, some of which had been pushed up at one end, thus showing like wedges above the flat expanse of the rest.

It was a little after sunset when we moved away, and proceeded to cross the lava field to the west of the chasm; for it would have been impossible for us to travel on the bed of the torrent itself. We had to climb some three hundred feet in order to reach the level terrace along which we proposed to march, and a most arduous ascent it was. The camels continually fell, and every one of them had to be reloaded at least once. For two long hours we struggled forward like maniacs, the silence of the night being broken frequently by the cries of men, and the groaning of our poor animals. In those two hours we covered half a mile, and the moon, as though dis-

pleased with us, rose exactly behind the summit of a tall mountain close to us. Thus we had to endure a few extra hours of darkness before the shining disk at last showed itself over the crest, making the extinct volcano appear as though molten silver was welling out of its crater.

At last we gained the level terrace to which we had been climbing, and found it was the flattened rim of another crater. Its interior was not floored with sand, like the volcanoes of Hariri, but with hard, sharp black lava. The grim scene was made more curious by a tomb, which stood on the brink of the crater. This tomb was the finest we had yet seen in Danakil. It had been erected as a memorial to a long-dead chief, named Agulio. It consisted of two well-constructed cylindrical turrets, standing a few feet apart, which acted as gateposts of the entrance to a circular stone-walled enclosure. There was a large conical construction of lava flags inside the enclosure. Around the base of the interior cone were additional concentric circles of rocks. The whole was built symmetrically, and with great care. Before the entrance there stood a small dead tree, propped up with basalt stones, from the withered branches of which hung, and fluttered in the night air, shreds of the skins of wild animals. The monument was so impressive that the whole caravan halted in the moonlight for some moments to contemplate it.

We descended with difficulty into the crater, and found ourselves on a hard but fairly smooth surface. The moon lighted the black scenery, so that we could see the complete circle of the crater's rim above us. The mournful clanging sounds, made by fragments of stone under the feet of the animals, seemed appropriate to the horrid scenery, scenery such as one supposes to exist on the face of a spent planet, rotating aimlessly in space.

Presently we climbed over the rim of the crater again, and descended to the familiar earth once more. We were now on the Assaissa plain, and proceeding across it, we came once more to the watercourse which we had left at Galaito. It was

after midnight when we halted under some thorn bushes. The night was hot, and it was difficult to rest. On the morrow we awoke exhausted, for we had barely lain down for three hours. It was impossible to sleep after sunrise.

The place of our halt was called Dakbwie; it was our first camp in the Biru Sultanate. On examining our animals, we discovered that more than half of them had wounds. Many were lame, and some could hardly walk at all. The men, too, had suffered severely, and were showing the effects of the hardships they had undergone. Wolde Jesus had been sick for the last two days, and now could scarcely drag himself along. Dimsa was in even worse case, and we decided that he must be placed on a camel in future. Osman remained in the same state, and of course continued to use a camel, as he had done for nearly two weeks past. The remainder of the men were all more or less debilitated. We three Europeans had supported the strain better than any of the others, except the Danakils, and I think, indeed, that we had kept our habitual condition and energy quite as well as had those natives of the country themselves.

I wanted to inspect more closely the monumental tomb of Agulio, and, accordingly, I now took Wolde Johannes, and a mule loaded with water-bottles, and with them retraced our steps of the preceding night, disregarding Rosina's remonstrances. I re-crossed the Assaissa plain, with the solitary Mount Egralita away on my right hand. To the south-east, there was a flat expanse of country, called Dagazo, a continuation northward of the Gohoi plain. The Assaissa and the Dagazo lie side by side, on opposite banks of the Galaito water-course, and both come to an end at the foot of the isolated eminence of Mount Dagar. Dakbwie, the place of our latest encampment, lay at the western extremity of Mount Dagar.

These place-names, as usual throughout this exploration, were given me day by day by the friendly guides or chiefs, because we were crossing lands for which no maps existed. Even the diaries and journals of the three ill-fated expedi-

tions previous to ours were lost in the massacres. Sometimes I had to use patience and cunning to get the names of the physical features of the country because of the natives' suspicion, but I was glad I succeeded, for this prevented me from yielding to the custom of christening my discoveries after some pale-faced royal or political personage — a practice I disapprove of, unless one is confronted with an absolutely anonymous region such as a polar waste or a planet telephotographically surveyed; and even then one can label the Creator's works with something more attractive than fairly useless men's names.

At last I came to the place where the monument stood. I saw there were two other tombs close to it: these we had not observed when we passed on the previous night. We descended to the bottom of the crater, and then climbed out of it at the opposite side, somewhat further east than the place where we had crossed with the caravan. On the external slope at this point, I found a semi-circular wall enclosing a cemetery. Here there were several tombs, cairns and turrets, some isolated, others grouped together, built with alternate courses of black and white stone, perfectly worked. Some of these, beginning from the usual circular ground-plan, rose in a tapering spiral. All the stones were extraordinarily well squared, though they had been fashioned by blows from another piece of stone, instead of a hammer and chisel.

As I was studying these memorials to the dead two Danakils suddenly made their appearance. They carried lances and waterskins, in the invariable way, the former resting on their shoulders and the back of the neck, and being grasped at the extremities by the raised hands. Their left hands, besides grasping the spear, held also the waterskin by its neck. The men wore rough skins round their loins, and had necklaces of teeth and pretty stones, strung on a leather thong. On the upper arm each had an amulet-case, affixed by means of another thong. The fact that they wore skins round their loins was an indication that we were beyond the line where

cloth has penetrated, whether by industry, trade, or successive plunderings, and hence were among the most primitive of conditions.

The two savages approached close to us, and seemed to be very curious concerning the glittering metal parts of my camera. Wolde Johannes was far from tranquil in the presence of these braves, and pointing to the sun he gave me to understand that it was high time we returned to camp.

I walked round the tombs once more, and then we set off to retrace our steps to the camp, followed by the two Danakils. The latter seemed very quiet and respectful, and scrupulously kept at a distance of some yards from us. The return journey was exceedingly hot, the sun being high in the heavens by this time. Rosina had come out of camp with a few men, and stationed himself in the shade of a large boulder, so as to be nearer to aid me if I should fall into danger. He was very glad to see me again, and lectured me on the foolhardiness of inspecting curiosities under the killing midday sun, amongst hostile tribesmen.

In the afternoon, the two Danakils came and informed us through the interpreter that they proposed to call out their tribe in full force, in order to exact compensation from me for having insulted, destroyed, and walked upon the tombs of their great ones, and committed other outrages.

In spite of the falsity of the accusation, I realized, from the signs of fear that had appeared in the faces of our men, that the affair might take a dangerous turn. The idea had probably occurred to the Danakils that this was an excellent opportunity to carry out a little 'legal' pillage, but it would require very little to give them more sanguinary ideas. They demanded compensation provisionally, and naively said we must wait where we were until they had had an opportunity to muster their whole tribe, and bring it to the spot. They said that if we were to leave they would very soon overtake us. Alio and his Silver Baton were of no account here in Biru, but the Gwia guide explained to them that we three Europeans were

men of great renown, and entitled to high respect, in proof whereof the Anfari had granted us the privilege of bearing his Silver Baton. We informed the Danakils that if they had thoughts of molesting us (it was in this vicinity in 1881 that the Italian, Giulietti, and fourteen sailors were massacred) they had better abandon them, for as soon as it was known that we had been interfered with, thousands of our tribe would come and wipe out every living creature of their breed. We added that we had no intention of waiting there for their tribe to assemble, and that if they ventured to attack us we should answer them with rifle-bullets.

The two Danakils grew sulky, and quickly marched out of sight across the plain, going towards the mountain in the south. For our part, we wasted no time, and although it was yet early in the afternoon we began to load the animals, and within one hour we were on the march. The operation of loading usually occupied two hours at the least.

It so happened that, apart from the heat (161° F.), we had done a wise thing in starting early, for we found it much easier to make our way over the broken lava field in the sunlight than we had at night. We climbed to a higher terrace, stumbling across a maze of huge pieces of rock in every conceivable position. The edges of every rock had a cutting sharpness, and pitfalls yawned everywhere. Hardly once in a thousand steps were we able to place a foot flat on the ground. For four and a half hours we struggled forward, and in spite of all our pains, we felt glad that it was not night, for if it had been, we must have been compelled to give up the endeavour until daylight. The Agulio Danakils were kinder than they knew when they caused us to hasten over this ground before darkness fell. These tremendous lava fields are known as Darda.

To the northward, these jagged stony levels ended in a chasm under a great wall of volcanic rock, running in the direction NNW. Behind the latter there rose another similar wall, and behind that yet another, each taller than the one in

front. They looked like the threefold cyclopean fortifications of a gigantic city. Their visible face was perhaps ten miles in length, and where they came to an end further mountainous features rose, and continued in the same direction, until they were lost to sight in the distance. This series of natural ramparts was called the Auginnale. Its highest range rose to a height of some 900 feet above the level of the plain in front. At sunset, the vertical precipices were turned to a luminous red, and as the sky changed from rose-red to violet and blue-black, the grim lava fields were plunged in darkness. Then the stars became suddenly visible in the sky, as though hung there miraculously.

When the darkness grew denser we halted, feeling that we had no strength to go further. We were in a completely lifeless country, with not a blade of grass, not a thorn, not an insect on the ground or in the air. It was imperative that we should continue our march as soon as we had had a little rest. Fortunately, we had been able to find a small place where the rocks were fairly level, and the camels were able to lie down without fear of hurting themselves on sharp stones. We ourselves spread mattings and sacks on the ground, more to escape the unbearable contact of the body with the baking soil or rocks than to avoid its roughness. The surface was still too uneven for all four legs of a camp-bed to remain on it at once.

On the morrow we rose early, and issued a second ration of water to all. Then we bandaged wounds, many of them received the day before in the rocky lava field, and proceeded to tie the sick men on their camels. It was June 6, 1928, my thirty-seventh birthday.

After we had marched for several hours, the awful volcanic ground showed signs of coming to an end at last. We were going down a slight incline, and ahead of us I could see some small stretches of sand. Though the sun was now high, we made great efforts to reach the sandy patches before calling a halt. But this part was perhaps more difficult than any that had gone before. We fell frequently, cutting and bruising our-

selves, and making our old wounds bleed anew. The wretched camels left shreds of their skin on the steel-hard rocks. But all the while we could see below us the encouraging sight of the level sandy plain. Down there, too, there was the sign of a dry watercourse, the same Galaito which we had encountered before, and which meandered steadily to the north.

From the Auginnale ravines there issued another torrent, the Adoddahara. This crossed the plain ahead, and eventually joined the Galaito. The plain itself was named Galatibar. We reached it at last, and it was an immense relief to us to be able to place our feet once more on soft sand. Under the foremost of the Auginnale precipices there was a water-hole named Dedda. This was a mere cup, or basin, situated in the bed of the Adoddahara, which here travelled over the volcanic rocks. We halted beside the pool, thankful that we had found water at last.

DEDDA TO GAIARA

HAVING seen our camp arranged, Rosina and I repaired to the water-hole, where I proposed to take a bath. There we found a cavity in the rocks, wherein, after I had bathed, we took shelter from the early sun. Two Danakil women came and filled their waterskins, and a little later six men of very savage aspect made their appearance. They had heard news of us, and had travelled far to see us. They loitered about the place, keeping always at a distance from us, and our interpreter was obliged to raise his voice in order that they might hear what he said to them. Each man carried his lance horizontally at the back of his shoulders, and gripped his small waterskin in his left hand. Occasionally, one or other of them would rest the butt of his lance on the ground, and stand with one leg twisted round the shaft, gripping the upper end with both hands in front of his chest. To sit or recline on the ground seemed too dangerous a relaxation for these wild men. All the natives of these parts, unlike those of the Awash valley, carried water constantly, a further sign of the droughtiness of the country.

Presently one of the savages came forward, and posted himself near the edge of the pool, as if to take account of the quantity of water used by our men. Our guide explained to the man that we wanted only sufficient for drinking purposes, for ourselves and our animals, and that we would give them presents in return. But the savage watcher remained grimly

observant of every drop we took, as though we had broken into a cellar, and were drinking wine of the choicest vintages, under the eyes of the outraged owner.

Our tent had been pitched on the plain, some two hundred paces from the water-hole, and as soon as the sun began to invade our small cave, Rosina and I went thither. We became so heated in walking that short distance under the high sun that we felt as though we had been working laboriously for hours. The temperature in the tent was 140° F. We lay there gasping, our eyes sore with the dry heat. From the Galatibar desert came gusts of hot wind, which flung coarse sand upon us. Torturing thoughts of fountains, and cool mountain springs, kept recurring in my mind. It seemed almost incredible that beautiful crystal-clear water was at that very moment being flung on the streets of a hundred cities in Europe. I thought that if I came out of this enterprise alive, I should desire hereafter no more than to live in a Christian country, close to an abundant water-supply and a made road. One feels one could be contented with so little when one is far from being in possession of that little.

In the afternoon our guide told us he could continue no further with our caravan, for he was not acquainted with the country to the northward. He added that he had persuaded an old man among the group of savages by the pool to accompany us. On making inquiry of the man, we found that he was willing to come.

Alio wished to remain with us, too, although his Silver Baton appeared to be rather a source of irritation to the inhabitants of the Biru Sultanate. The latter envy the Aussans for their comparative wealth. Alio's presence was welcome to us, as it was calculated to inform the tribes amongst whom we had now come that we were held in respect by the great Anfari, and that consequently it would be wise of them to show us due respect. To Alio, his present employment gave the opportunity of building up an important reputation for the remainder of his life. He was acquiring experiences

which would be recounted with great gusto on his return, and which he would, doubtless, contrive to incorporate into the official history of the Aussen State.

At sunset, having filled all our waterskins, we set off along the eastern edge of the Galatibar plain, accompanied by the new guide. Night came, and we still continued to travel fast and comfortably on the smooth surface. So level was it that it might have been artificially prepared for the passage of camels. Our guide seemed by no means certain of his whereabouts, but the Pole Star shone like a glittering beacon, and we decided to march directly on it. If we encountered obstructions, we could avoid them by bearing to our left until we came to the Adoddahara or Galaito watercourse. The old guide protested against our marching directly to the north; he seemed to be unduly impressed by the advantages of zig-zagging all over the plain.

After marching for three hours at an excellent pace, we came under the Akoba hills, and were delighted to find that the watercourse was there to meet us. The direction we had taken could not have been improved upon. We decided to call a halt.

The torrent-bed was wide, and was spread uniformly with the finest of white gravel, which shone under the moon. This gravel was hot, however, and although we slept on our camp beds, the heat which it radiated made us too uncomfortable to sleep well. I woke countless times through sheer discomfort, and before dawn I rose finally, as tired and weary as I had been when I retired at the end of the march. Of late, I had felt a heaviness in my head, and a languor of body, such as I was entirely unaccustomed to. The heat, the excessive fatigue, the bad food and water, which we consumed in spite of our revolting stomachs, were now having serious effects.

My thoughts on that heavy morning again ran on a subject about which we had often spoken during our halts in the wilderness. When Gustavo Bianchi and his companions, Diana and Monari, had fallen in this vicinity in 1884, mas-

sacred by the Danakils, after days similar to those which we were now enduring, death must have come to them as a not unwelcome liberation from their sufferings. My companions and I had often said to one another that if we were destined to die in this inferno of Danakil, then please fate it might be soon, for it was not infrequent that we were now brought to the verge of despair. On the morning to which I have now come in the course of my narrative, I repeated these words to Rosina and Pastori, and they assented. It was June 7, 1928, Rosina's fiftieth birthday.

It was marvellous to behold the manifestations of the will-power of our elderly friend, though the strain under which he lived had already marked his frame with heavy signs. He had become so thin that I often wondered how it was possible that he could stand upright and walk. We could plainly see that even if he were destined to finish this journey alive, the marks of what he had endured would remain visible on him for the remainder of his life.

We set off again before sunrise, and presently we came to another torrent, the Ekeioli, which, after winding round the southern and western base of the Akoba hills, joined the Adoddahara. The united watercourse was known as Tio. This now turned north-eastward, and entered a deep ravine in the basalt cliffs. The scene was one of great beauty and grandeur. The watercourse was like a gravelled road, between vertical walls of rock, some two hundred feet high. Those towering blue-black ramparts fell straight as a plumb-line, and keeping almost perfectly parallel, described curves and twists at every gunshot's length. But eventually the gravel came to an end, and the naked rock bed of the torrent showed, uneven with ribs and bosses. Yet there were few obstructing boulders, and we found it comparatively easy to pursue our way between the few gigantic monoliths which had fallen from the enclosing walls. We hastened on our course, hoping to get clear of the ravine before the sun turned it into an enormous oven. Occasional breaks in the

right-hand wall gave us glimpses of the peak of Mount Akoba, and through similar gaps on our left we sometimes saw that the basalt overlaid cliffs of chalk. This was the first sign of chalk we had met with. Lying there, the ancient white rock had been inundated and entombed by the black solidifying mass. Here and there, the funereal shroud had been shattered, and the older rock showed through the crevices, while fragments of both lay at the bottom of the ravine.

Geological observation, and speculation, if they could serve to distract the thoughts of the Europeans of our party, and so relieve their toil, had no lightening effect on the lot of our men. Osman remained tied to his camel-saddle, and every day there were two or three others too ill to walk. We were obliged to abandon some part of the loads, in order that the over-taxed camels might carry these sick men, and thus our collections of minerals, instead of increasing as we advanced, grew smaller. The invalids gave one another the opportunity to ride, mounting and dismounting by turns without quarrelling. On the contrary, we often witnessed examples of remarkable generosity among them.

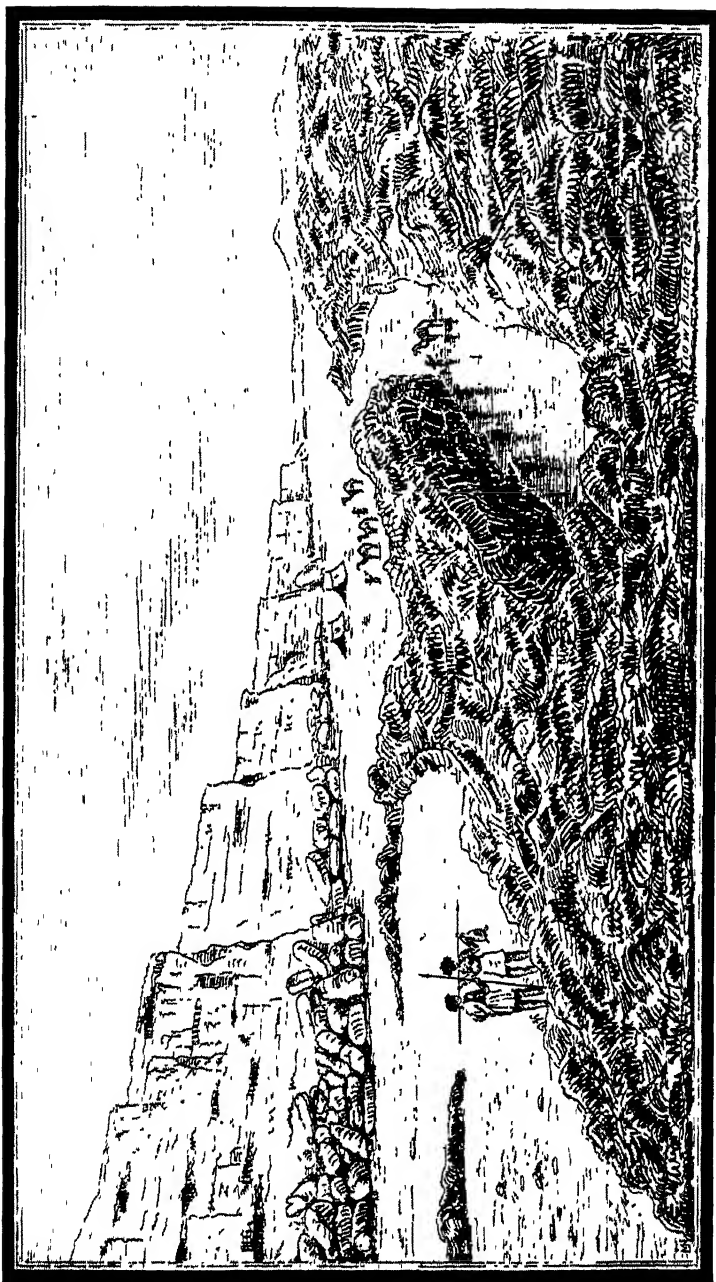
Dimsa, through kindness towards the other sick man, had refused to ride on a camel that morning, and it now occurred, in the Tio ravine, that he began to lag behind through weakness. Rosina and I frequently stayed waiting for him, and urged and encouraged him to keep up with the caravan. Presently, he failed to reappear round a bend, and we were obliged to walk back to ascertain what had happened to him. At last we found him, lying on the earth, as though crushed there. He answered us by repeating that he wanted to die where he was. We encouraged him to rise, and helped him along until he seemed to regain a little strength. The three of us were now some distance behind the caravan, which had gone from sight round a bend of the ravine. We tried to push on quickly, for it was not safe to remain detached from the main body in such a place. While we were thus going forward as expeditiously as possible, we chanced to see something crawling out from be-

hind a large boulder. It was Wolde Johannes. He had fallen there exhausted, but had been roused by hearing the sound of our voices. We took charge of him, and helped him along, too, and after a while, on rounding a curve of the ravine, we could see at the further end of a long straight reach our string of camels. We pointed out the sight to our two exhausted men, and urged them to make an effort to catch up with the animals. They said they thought they could manage to keep going by themselves, so Rosina and I pushed on ahead, in order to place ourselves equidistant between them and the caravan, and keep in touch with both. The ravine was perfectly suited to the waylaying of travellers, but fortunately the country was uninhabited. If any of the Danakils had pursued us that morning, they would have wrought their will on Dimsa and Wolde Johannes without the unfortunate Abyssinians opposing the least resistance, or uttering a cry.

In the meantime, Pastori marched at the head of the caravan, on the look-out for obstructions or hostile natives in front.

At last the narrow corridor, through which we had journeyed for a distance of eight miles, came to an end. With the exception of small fissures, there had been only one break in the lofty walls, sometimes as much as 300 feet in height. This break was a small ravine, which joined the main one from the right hand, at the point we had now reached. The right-hand wall diminished, and sank by degrees into the plain, which extended, dotted with outcrops of basalt, to the southward. On that side, the horizon was at last open to us, and the danger of finding ourselves trapped by hostile natives was much reduced.

We had proceeded only a short distance further, when we were overjoyed to see a large water-hole, set deeply in the basalt. At that sight, we offered up thanks to God. The pool was almost rectangular in shape, and was closed on three sides by vertical cliffs. On the fourth side, which was one of the shorter ones, a sloping ramp gave easy access to the water. In



TIO WATER-HOLE

the season of rains, the pool was flooded from the Tio torrent, by way of the sloping ramp. It was a remarkable work of nature, a natural reservoir.

Men and animals all ran to the water's edge, and drank deeply of the clean fluid. We decided to camp at this spot, and accordingly we returned to the bed of the Tio, and selected a position on its left-hand side; that is, under the high cliff which on that side still continued northward. The basalt, however, had come to an end, and the cliff, some 150 feet high, consisted of naked chalk. In the face of this wall there were caves and niches, so numerous that they could have housed a large community of troglodytes. The only shadow in the torrent-bed was that cast by the chalk boulders which lay there, and under these we crawled and hid ourselves from the burning sun, after unloading the animals, and giving each of the mules a few handfuls of millet flour. There was nothing whatever for the camels to eat.

We had already prepared ourselves to sit out the hot hours, when we noticed that Dimsa and Wolde Johannes had not yet made their appearance. As soon as their absence was realized, their Coptic comrades took up their arms and went out to search for them. They soon found Dimsa, for he had fainted, and fallen amongst the stones, no more than two hundred yards from the place in which we were encamped. He could not be seen from where we were, because the ground was covered with outcrops of basalt, and boulders, which completely hid him from sight as he lay on the ground amongst them. There was no trace of Wolde Johannes.

Dimsa's rescuers carried him into camp, and we then insisted on their resting for some minutes, for every step which a man took in that heat affected him as though it had been hard work. In the meantime, we organized two search-parties; one to be led by Pastori, and the other by Rosina and me. The ground was so uneven and full of basalt bosses and hollows, that a minute inspection of every square yard was essential if the man was to be found. If he could still stand on his feet

we might have seen him now and then, as he came over the eminences, but if he were lying in a hollow, or even behind a boulder, he would be invisible at the distance of a couple of yards.

The temperature was 168° F. when we started out. We peered everywhere with straining eyes, but there was no sign of a man walking anywhere amongst the infernal stones. To the east and south, the lava fields extended further than the eye could see. Northward, the left-hand cliff of the torrent stretched into the distance, and to the westward, we could see nothing but the last curve of the grim ravine whence we had just come. The whole ghastly landscape was quivering under the noonday sun, a waste of scorching rocks, without the faintest sign of life anywhere. We searched carefully, but Wolde Johannes was nowhere to be found. Rosina and I were obliged to return to camp with our party, for the heat was too much for us. Pastori returned with his men soon after. But three countrymen of Wolde Johannes begged to be allowed to continue the search without delay, and we let the brave fellows go.

At some time past noon we saw these three men returning, carrying their friend between them. The poor fellow had become insane. They had found him lying amongst the stones exhausted, for he had completely lost his way. On coming to the mouth of the ravine, he had turned to the eastward, instead of continuing to follow the bed of the torrent. Thereafter, every step he took carried him further from us. It is a common thing for people, badly afflicted with the effects of thirst, to lose all sense of direction, or power of understanding landmarks.

Throughout the afternoon hours the poor fellow never ceased contorting his limbs and body, almost into knots, while he muttered incoherent words, and sometimes gave vent to awful cries. At last a coma fell upon him, and then he remained still and lifeless.

This Tio water-hole was a sad place, the scene of a memo-

nable disaster, which took place in 1884 — the massacre of Bianchi and his companions.

The first massacre of an expedition in Danakil occurred in 1875, when Werner Munzinger, his wife, children, servants, and an escort of Egyptian soldiers, were killed to the last soul. Munzinger, who was travelling in the interests of the Khedive Ismail, left Tajura for the Aussa, and managed with difficulty to reach Lake Assal. It was there that he and the rest of his party met their end.

The second fatality was the massacre of Giulietti and his companion, Biglieri, with fourteen sailors. They had attempted to pass from the port of Assab to the Plateau, but were killed in the Biru Sultanate. This occurred in 1881.

Bianchi's object in entering Danakil was similar to that of Giulietti: namely, to investigate the possibility of opening a trade route through it, to connect the Abyssinian Plateau with a port or ports on the Red Sea Coast, more particularly with Assab, which the Italians had lately occupied. In the eighties, no doubt, the scheme of developing Assab seemed a promising one, for there was no railway connecting the Plateau with Jibuti; neither was anything known about the difficulties of traversing the Danakil territories.

Bianchi started from the Plateau and worked eastward, and the place where he met his end was not known with certainty, for contradictory reports had reached the coast and the Plateau. The reports were merely hearsay, passed on from tribe to tribe, and entirely unsupported by the direct evidence of an eye-witness, for not even a single native accompanying Bianchi had ever returned from that fatal journey.

Ever since leaving Addis Ababa, my two companions and I had harboured a keen desire to find the place where Bianchi and his comrades had fallen, and to erect some sort of memorial to them there, if possible. It had been of little use making any inquiry in Lower Danakil, or in the Aussa, as it was unlikely that anything would be known of the matter in places so distant from the scene of the disaster. Since leaving the

Aussa, however, we had made a point of indirectly questioning every stranger we met, after first overcoming their suspicions by giving them presents. They were, naturally, unwilling to give us information concerning the murder of our 'brothers,' for they feared that retribution might be visited on them, either by us or by those whom they might betray. It was, therefore, essential that we should keep our object hidden.

Our first success in the prosecution of this quest was at Dedda, where, from certain hesitations and contradictions in the answers of the savages, we were able to gather that the massacre had been perpetrated near that place. It was only at the end of our halt there that we were able to get in touch with those suspicious men, but, with the help of our interpreter and Alio, we at last managed to establish some sort of contact with them, and even engaged a guide from among their number, as has been related. Alio was aware of our object, and we found him extremely useful in cautiously questioning the local natives. However, we had learnt nothing beyond the fact that the massacre had occurred at no great distance from Dedda.

In the course of the torrid afternoon at the Tio water-hole, I busied myself in writing my journal, and in observing the curious erosions in the chalk. In some of the hollows there were beautiful stalactites. Presently, I summoned Alio, our interpreter, and the Dedda guide, and proceeded to ask them the names of places and physical features in the surrounding district. In the course of this questioning, I managed to make several remarks to the guide, through the interpreter, which were calculated to draw from him some further information concerning Bianchi. To our extreme surprise, the guide betrayed the fact that the ill-fated Italians had been done to death at the Tio water-hole, the very place where we were sitting. I instinctively threw a startled glance round the inhospitable scene. We were all shocked into silence, and signalling to the servants to leave us, we remained motionless until they

had gone away. Then we three began to pile up a cairn of stones on that spot. Presently we called some of the men to come and assist in the work

A few Danakils made their appearance. We could not tell whence they came, for all around us, in every direction, the country seemed totally unfit to support life. These savages now approached us with hostile looks. Alio and the guide, and others of our men who spoke the Danakil tongue, warned us that the natives supposed that we had come to avenge the death of those Farangis who had been massacred forty years ago. We instructed our men to tell them that we came in peace, and that we merely wished to erect a memorial to the dead. The savages, however, seemed far from satisfied. They began to use threats; the situation was not improving. We had only two alternatives: either we could try to placate the savages, or we could continue building our cairn without appearing to be aware of their attitude. The former appeared to be impossible, and the latter would probably lead to our own eventual massacre. All they had to do was to muster their tribe, stampede our animals, and drive us away from the water-hole by force of numbers.

After threatening to raise their tribe, the Danakils left us, and were soon lost to sight in the chaos of rocks. We knew quite well that, although these had left, we were still under observation. We therefore stopped our cairn-building for the present, hoping to be able to propitiate with gifts any Danakils who might appear on the morrow, and then go on with the work.

But this was not to be, for in the evening our sorely-tried men came and besought us to leave the place that night, and on no account to wait there for a conference with the natives in the morning. By leaving at once, we could be in the territory of another tribe by the next morning, and should thus be safe from pursuit. Alio, who seemed somewhat alarmed at the recollection of his part in the transactions with the savages, strongly supported this petition. We consented to leave

in the middle of the night, and ordered that all the goatskins be filled with water.

As the moon rose, we loaded the animals. A violent wind started up, coming from the Harak desert, and in the teeth of this we left the ill-omened Tio water-hole. The time was about three o'clock in the morning. We followed the watercourse downstream, with four sick men riding on camels, and the remainder so weak that they could hardly stand.

After a mile and a half, the watercourse again entered a narrow ravine, or corridor. Basalt and chalk formed its formidable sides. Those cliffs appeared fantastic under the moonlight, especially at a point where two tributary ravines joined the main chasm on opposite sides. This meeting-place of four gorges formed a scene of incomparable wildness. There seemed a fierce and terrible constriction about that crossing of watercourses, though it was now dry and silent.

We proceeded on our way slowly, in a mournful line under the moon. The stones under our feet were still hot, with the stored heat of the noonday sun. Higher than the loads of the swaying file of camels, were the four sick men who rode there, four human figures wedged between boxes and baggage to which they clung in despairing silence. Those men atop the wavering camels seemed to be ragged scarecrows, rather than human beings with life in them. There was no animation in their passively reeling movements.

Dawn came, bringing with it extraordinary effects of light in the ravine. Though the sun had not yet risen, the moon paled and fled away, driven off by the growing glare that foretells the terrible approach of the sun, which tolerates no withstanding, either in the sky or on the earth. But it had not yet risen. Of a sudden we rounded a bend, and saw before us, down a long vista of close walls, the open Harak desert. It was a boundless expanse of rippled sand, rolling away under the rose and yellow light. As we emerged from the mouth of the ravine I was appalled at the sight of that terrible desert, filling all the vast spaces under the horizon to the north and

east. Westward, there was a chalk terrace and leaving the watercourse, we proceeded under this to the northward. On the loose sand, our footsteps no longer made any sound. The infinite expanse resembled in form the ocean, strangely still.

The desert was now suddenly, almost imperceptibly, inundated with the horizontal rays of the rising sun. With the aid of these first glancing gleams of light, we could see a series of hills to the south. Far over the sea of sand, to the east and north-east, there now appeared the outline of grim volcanic cones. These faint details were soon obscured again by the haze, and shimmering mirages throbbed over the plain. After marching for five hours and a half, we entered a wide opening in the chalk bank, where there was a torrent-bed. Further up, it became narrower, and soon we found ourselves between basalt cliffs. We sent Alio and the guide ahead to look for water, and waited where we were with the rest of the caravan. They were absent for some length of time, and as it was becoming intensely hot, we gave orders to unload the animals. Presently the guide and Alio returned, and informed us they had found two pools of good water, one above the other, and separated by a narrow ridge of rock. We sent the animals to the lower water-hole, so that they might drink and splash to their hearts' content, while the upper pool we reserved for drinking-water for ourselves. We planned to leave the same night, for the place was entirely barren of vegetation, and was as hot as a furnace. The watercourse was called Gaiara, and flowing north-east, it eventually joined the Tio. After continuing a few miles further in the same direction, the united stream lost itself in a depression in the sands. The guide also explained to us that a certain glittering, which we had noticed in the same direction, was caused by a salt deposit near the junction of the watercourses.

Our men found shelter in the interstices of the tabular chalk, and we Europeans took refuge in a small cave above. We had three men gravely ill, and another who had lost his reason; and the heat was increasing with every day that passed.

Nobody felt inclined to eat anything, and all were terribly reduced by toil and hardships. Yet we still had three weeks of this ordeal in front of us — provided that the hostility of the natives and the difficulty of finding water did not prove beyond our endurance. After reviewing these facts, we decided to spend at Gaiara the remainder of that day.

SUNI MAA

AFTER noon we noticed, as we were hiding in the cave, a few Danakils, who occasionally passed and repassed, one at a time, along the torrent-bed below. They walked bareheaded under that sun, which would have killed any one of us had we dared to expose ourselves to it. It seemed to us that the presence of natives in that desolate place was highly curious: they would not have come there without reason. It was evident that the news of our advance had reached their village in the night, and was the cause of their coming here to meet us.

Presently, some more savages made their appearance, on the rim of the opposite wall of the ravine. Their outlines showed like ants, that walked upright on the white chalk edge in the blinding glare. The temperature outside was 167° F., and even in the shadow of our cave it was 149° F. The direct light, and the reflections, combined to produce an almost unbearable glare. This African Rift, one of the most sunken parts of the earth's crust, is scourged by greater heat than afflicts any other place on the globe. Our men had crawled like dazed insects under the stones, in search of a little shade. We had no desire for food, but sat on the ground, continually sipping water. Yet, at midday, we forced ourselves to eat some crusts of unleavened bread, soaked in coffee. The latter had been brewed some days before, and carried with us in bottles. This was fortunate for us, for there was no fuel in

the ravine. In similar circumstances, we had been in the habit of breaking up a box, or even the woodwork of a pack-saddle. Sometimes, we had taken a saddle from the back of a camel for this purpose, but more usually it reverted to the fuel-heap by the death of the camel which had carried it. When the loads of some of the animals had been lightened, in order to allow sick men to mount them, we had taken great care to save all the wood before abandoning any articles in the desert.

In this Gaiara ravine, the heat was almost past endurance. Our clothes felt hot to the hand, and on passing a finger over one of the buttons, one started with the fierce scorching heat of it. A rifle, which had been placed even in the shade, could not be grasped by the barrel or any other metallic part. We grew watchful and cautious as to what we might touch, and continually studied how to touch different objects, so that we might not increase the aching discomfort in which we existed. The wide torrent-bed below us seemed to simmer and boil in the quivering air. The sun began to invade our cave with slow implacable ferocity, so that we were obliged to descend, and find shelter under the stones. We kept the kidskin waterbags always at hand, for without their contents we should soon have succumbed to the heat of that inferno. In the afternoon, a hot wind arose, and blew up clouds of sand. We drew towels over our faces, in order to keep the dust and grit from our eyes and mouths. Sitting half-stunned in the silence of this glowing furnace, we were like men struck motionless by the curse of fate.

Now we heard the stones near us moving, as if men were walking on them. A glimmer of surprise flashed into my mind, as I heard the guttural voices of natives.

Abdul Kader, Abulker, Alio, and the Dedda guide crawled out of their holes amongst the stones, and went to find out who was approaching. They found there were four natives there, to whom they offered food and coffee, inviting them to sit with them. They also brewed tea, of which all Danakils are inordinately fond, though most of them, like those here, had

never tasted tea or coffee before. We were cheered by this visit, because it showed us, at least, that we were not entirely marooned in the limitless waste. We requested Abdul Kader to give some presents to those savages. We also gave them tobacco, for they were anxious to discover its properties, having never before smoked it. The men were nearly naked, and miserably thin. They and their fellows lived tenaciously in the rare places where their goats could subsist, supporting their famished lives with milk and flesh. They know no other article of diet, and if, in a year of exceptional drought, their animals succumb in the torrid wilderness, then they themselves die too. If their animals cannot keep alive, they themselves gradually die out, through sheer thirst and lack of food. They seldom take the bold step of migrating to another part of the land, where conditions are better, unless they are still strong and numerous. For, though they be dying by degrees of famine, there remains at least the hope that the Unseen Powers will relent towards them; but in the territories of a neighbouring tribe, death alone awaits them.

Although, at first, we had been cheered by the visit of the four savages we soon realized that they had come with intentions the opposite of peaceful. From the kitchen, our chancellory, where strangers were received, there now came whispers that intercourse was becoming strained. Abdul Kader, on coming to return to us the keys of the gift-boxes, said: 'Master, these Danakil visitors bad men!' We commanded our men of the kitchen to find out what were the grounds of the dispute, and then to bring the four men to us. Half an hour passed before the interpreter came to report that, of the four men, two were soldiers of Yassim, the Biru Sultan, and they had been sent to stop us. The other two were local savages, who had joined them, and who informed our men that other natives were to gather here soon in order to watch the water-holes.

We commanded that the four men be brought before us. The two soldiers then said they could not allow us to travel

through their country, unless we first secured Yassim's permission. We must send envoys to the Sultan before we proceeded further.

Now, Yassim's place of residence was distant many days' journey from Gaiara, and it was therefore plain to us that the two soldiers had not been sent to us by their lord. In fact, it was impossible that he could be aware of our arrival, even now. The soldiers were merely making an officious attempt to hold us up. Their activities would doubtless have been approved by the Sultan, had he been aware of them, and by every tribesman, but that they held a direct mission from the ruler to stop us was physically impossible. The Sultan's place of residence lay to the east, at a distance of seven marches.

There now began a series of discussions, repeated again and again *ad nauseam*, which were to continue for three mortal days in the furious heat of that ravine, made more terrible by the constant lurking threat of violence from the savages, until we were crushed almost into the uttermost depths of despair.

We informed the four natives that we were unable to send any of our men to Yassim, for, were we to do so, we ourselves and our animals would all be dead from starvation before they returned to us, for we had barely enough millet to last us two weeks. They then suggested that all of us should go to the Sultan. We answered that we had no desire to lengthen our journey at this critical season, with our animals already in low condition, for our way lay towards the north, not to the east. Besides this, we should again have suffered from lack of food, for the Sultan possessed no more than would suffice for the needs of his followers. We knew they were experiencing a terrible famine. People were already dying of starvation, and the Sultan had no bounty to bestow upon strangers.

They then requested us to remain where we were, while they themselves went to report to their chief. We replied that although we did not for a moment doubt their good intentions, we could not wait an indefinite time for their return.

The other two savages told us they had joined forces with the soldiers in order to add weight to what they desired to make known to us: namely, that they knew perfectly well that we had come to their country in order to avenge the blood of our murdered brothers. Our intentions being hostile, it was imperative that we should remain where we were until Yassim could be communicated with.

Having reached this unsatisfactory position, we broke off the conversations. The two soldiers, although they wore no other clothes than the rest of the natives, were undoubtedly employed in some official capacity. We learnt that they had come upon us by chance, while on their way to execute a mission of some sort to the west. This tended to confirm us in our surmise that news of our arrival had not yet reached Yassim.

All four men were emphatic in requesting us to remain until permission to proceed had been obtained from Yassim. They added, as a sort of threat in the event of our disregarding their instructions, that the whole tribe was eager to molest us, having heard of our cairn-building at Tio. We then informed them that we were prepared to discuss the matter with their tribal chief. The Dedda guide was sent to summon him to our presence, the local savages pointing out the way to his village-across the chalk terraces.

In the meantime, several more natives had gathered, and joined those who had made their appearance earlier. The whole party disposed themselves around the upper water-hole, and denied our men access to it. The lower one had been much fouled by our animals by this time, but, nevertheless, we now had to use it for all purposes. The upper water-hole was some thirty feet above the lower, for there was a sudden drop in the bed of the ravine at that point. In order to gain access to it, one was obliged to climb along small ledges in the face of the cliff.

On reviewing the situation, we came to the conclusion that if we failed to conciliate the natives two courses of action were open to us: either, we could issue from the ravine, and take

to the open desert, half a mile to the east, and there take our chance of finding water before being overtaken by death; or, we could take the upper water-hole by force, at the price, probably, of the lives of several of the savages. This latter plan would, almost certainly, prove fatal to all our party in the end, as the natives merely had to muster a considerable force, when they could kill us all by rolling stones down on our heads from the rim of the cliff on either side of the narrow ravine.

Our situation was a perilous one, and the use of force against the natives would not advantage us. Our animals were almost exhausted, and there was not a vestige of food for them in this place. If we could not succeed in gaining the goodwill of the Danakils, so as to procure a guide from among them, and be allowed to proceed unmolested, then we must soon perish to the last man and animal.

Night fell (June 8), and it was quite out of the question to think of leaving Gaiara, as we had planned to do. We broke up a box, in order to obtain fuel for coffee-making, and after drinking, we tried to sleep. But the heat radiated from the ground was so great that we found it impossible to maintain a recumbent position, even on our camp-beds. Presently, the moon rose, and shone with calm indifference on us and our misery.

Before sunrise, we got up, Rosina reeling with exhaustion, and proceeded to climb again into the cave in the face of the cliff. Then the sun appeared over the edge of the desert, beyond the mouth of the ravine. The deadly rays came shooting into the torrent-bed, grazing its floor. Lying east and west, our ravine was filled with the maddening glare, from the first moment of sunrise until the last flicker of sunset.

The four Danakils came again, and were as unreasonable as on the day before. We ordered that gifts of tea and tobacco should be given to them, and handfuls of millet flour. An hour before noon, the Dedda guide made his appearance. He was accompanied by two natives, one of whom was the tribal

chief. The latter might have just been raised from the tomb, so emaciated was he. It was a source of wonder to us how, being so thin, he could yet keep alive. He climbed up to our cave with evident effort, and came in — an assemblage of bones, covered with an old wrinkled skin. He carried a lance, and a kidskin full of water. He saluted us briefly and uncere- moniously, and we responded in similar fashion. I said to my friends: ' Let us hope the fellow does not die in this place, or we shall be dead men before a new judge is found to sanction our departure.'

Our small cave had become full of natives, but the crowd, far from raising the temperature, brought a feeling of cool- ness. They formed, at least, a barrier against the outer glare, and human bodies at 98° F. are strangely cool to the touch in an atmospheric temperature of nearly double that. So, to cool our hands, we would place them now and then under our arm- pits. The sensation was found to be strangely comforting.

We ordered coffee to be distributed to all our visitors, and when the old mummified chief had recovered from his exer- tions, we began to talk of business. The ancient man was called Suni Maa. Comporting ourselves as though we had seen no signs of hostility towards us since our arrival, we informed him that we wanted a guide to conduct us to the northward, and further that we desired to supply ourselves with water from the upper pool. We added that we were not only pre- pared to pay for every service rendered to us, but that we would also give presents to everybody.

The old man answered that there were two of Yassim's soldiers on the spot, that what they had said to us was equiva- lent to an official intimation, and that we must remain where we were until the Sultan had been communicated with. We answered again that by the time the desired permission could arrive, we should all be dead of famine, and our camels with us. Suni Maa replied that that was no concern of his. He added, unpleasantly, that if we were friends of the Aussan Anfari, we were just as certainly enemies of Yassim, for the

two rulers were anything but friends. We explained to him that Danakil politics had no interest for us, since we were travelling with the sole object of acquiring knowledge, and had no intention of harming the Danakils. We added that since the Anfari had given us, as a guide, Alio with his Silver Baton, it was obvious that he considered us as being worthy of courtesy and assistance. We thought it but reasonable to assume that Yassim would extend to us the same degree of consideration, and that he would allow us to pass across his territory without hindrance. Suni Maa rejoined that, even admitting that we were not particular friends of the Anfari, the fact remained that he knew we wanted to discover the place of the massacre, and had in fact set us on the way to it, in order that we might take our revenge on the subjects of Yassim. Had we not already begun our retributive machinations, with that cairn of ours at Tio? We told the old man that we wanted no revenge, but had merely desired to see the place where our countrymen had fallen.

Midday passed and we adjourned the proceedings in order to take a little food, and change our position. The sunlight had penetrated into our cave, heating a considerable part of the floor, and so filling the whole place with fiery reflected heat. All the natives went down to our kitchen, and we retired to a new position, which we had discovered on the preceding evening. We ate a handful of boiled rice, and drank a little coffee.

After this brief respite, the negotiations were resumed, and the same remarks were repeated again and again, with a horrible creeping redundancy. This went on for four more hours, while the natives squatted around us, each taking frequent sips from his waterskin. In these countries, the continuation of life is inconceivable without drinking-water constantly at hand. Every half hour or so, Suni Maa would go apart with a few of his men, and they would talk quietly together, sometimes whispering into one another's ear. After a little of this, they would all come back and resume their places in the

council. Sometimes, they called Alio and the Dedda guide to go apart with them. As far as we were concerned, the same questions and answers were repeated endlessly — a few words at a time, so that the interpreter might render them, phrase by phrase.

We offered gifts of money, and other things, to Suni Maa, to the two soldiers, and to all the people, on condition that we were allowed to proceed on our way that evening; but nothing would move these savages. Their reply was constantly reiterated: 'You will wait for the assent of Yassim. You came here because of the massacre which Suni Maa, who is very old, remembers.' We learnt, indeed, from the old man, that the reason for the murder of the explorers was the desire of the assassins to acquire their possessions. The three white men had been betrayed by one of their servants, who had concerted a plan with the Danakils. Suni Maa said, 'What urges the savage Afar to plunder is his own misery and hunger. He is covetous of the things which you possess. Your valuables are too attractive for him to resist. See what we are like, and how we live! I am too old now to care for possessions, and it is fortunate for you that it is so. Even now, I am checking the desires of the young men, who are blinded by the sight of the fine things which you have. You have firearms and ammunition. Your rifles are beautiful! We have only spears. A man would willingly stake his life to obtain one of your weapons.'

We told the old man that we would give him a rifle, or even two, if he would permit us to continue our journey. But he refused everything, and repeated that Yassim's permission was first necessary.

After some six hours of discussion, the two soldiers showed signs of yielding to our wishes. They accepted our presents of money, saying they were sure the Sultan would not object to our proceeding to the north. They declined to interfere in the matter of the blood of our murdered countrymen, for this was a matter which concerned Suni Maa, among whose followers they were not numbered. The two soldiers asked for a

hundred thalers each, with as much understanding as a child might display in asking for a hundred automobiles, or a hundred houses. We gave them five thalers each, and to each of the two local natives who had come with them we gave two thalers. When the transaction was completed, we gave the soldiers five more thalers each, and also some tobacco and beads, in order to make a show of persuasive liberality. Our doubling the amount which had already satisfied them, quite overwhelmed the simple creatures.

The evening had now come, and we longed to leave the ravine, and make a good march during the night. We told Suni Maa he was not to be bashful, but that he might ask us for anything he might have a fancy for. We mentioned that we should like to leave at moonrise, and would be grateful if he would indicate one of his men who was competent to act as our guide. At last he seemed to be relenting towards us, and we secretly rejoiced. Our longed-for escape was very near at hand. We took the opportunity of quietly sending our men to the water-hole, to fill all the empty goatskins. They were directed to go to the lower pool, though its water was thick and black — indeed, no better now than that in a manure-heap ditch — for, had they attempted to climb to the upper pool, they might have irritated anew the savages who guarded it. We were intensely concerned to avoid the least beginnings of friction between our men and the natives. From a minute spark, there might have arisen a conflagration which would have meant no escape for any living soul of us. Rosina and I went to the water-hole, to watch the men filling the skins. When we returned with them to the encampment, Settie was driving in the camels. Suni Maa raised no objection to these obvious preparations for departure; on the contrary, he remarked that it was not right of Yassim's soldiers to accept money from us. We asked the old man whether he had a guide ready for us. He replied that he had a very capable man who knew the district well. It appeared that Suni Maa had been completely won over to our side. We entered into a friendly conversation with him. in the course of which he

asked us where we hoped to arrive eventually. As for himself, he said, he had never cared to leave the Harak desert, where he had spent his life about the four or five water-holes which belonged to his clan. He now lived in a nearby village, where some scattered bushes grew. He said that less than forty people lived there with him, but that there were other villages in the neighbourhood. In reply to our questions, he told us that they possessed goats, and a few sheep, but the conditions of life were hard. We said that in our country when conditions became difficult, the people emigrated. He replied: 'If strangers come to our land we kill them, and it is right that they should do so to us, if we encroach on their territories.' Finding the old man in an expansive mood, I said: 'So, then, we are in risk of our lives here in your marches?'

'In great danger indeed,' said he, 'especially with the younger men who are avaricious, and whose short life has not yet raised them above the soil to which they cling. They do not know that there are things, not of this world, but mysterious, and superior, and worthy of being sought to the exclusion of everything else.'

We were startled to find in that living skeleton a lofty and philosophical thoughtfulness. Oh, if we could only guess what lever it was necessary to apply in order to manipulate the mental processes of that strange creature, so that they would work in our favour! The old writhing being, like a dried-up lizard, cast a glance around him and walked away from us, half curved down, his head drooping, and wielding his long spear, the shaft of which was polished smooth by long gripping of his bony hand. The same hand grasped his kidskin water-bag. Thus, with uneven steps, his sandals shaking about on his skeleton feet, the old man, with no clothing but a dirty skin about his loins, moved away. We watched him go, and interpreted his vague philosophic utterances as an assent to our departure, and a farewell. With a quick glance, I gave Settie to understand that he was to proceed with the loading, and to do it quietly.

We were in the midst of our preparations to leave, when word came from the kitchen to say that Suni Maa had not authorized our departure. In fact, he was saying again that we had not yet given satisfactory reasons for having come into the country, nor had we explained our anxiety to visit the place of the bloodshed.

We were at once flung down from the happy pinnacle on which our false hopes had placed us, and we now came very near to despair. The game we had entered on was indeed a killing one.

We went to the kitchen, and tried to make the old creature understand our intentions, but, instead of listening, he doddered to his feet, called the man who had come with him in the morning, and who was to have acted as our guide, and walked away with him, saying no word to anyone.

Alone, without somebody to show us the way, we dared not face the desert. The local natives had all agreed to telling us the nearest water-hole northward was six camel-marches distant. We felt unequal to facing such an ordeal. Our escape from Tio, and our detention here at Gaiara, had shaken everybody's nerve. We decided that the best thing we could do was to have Suni Maa summoned again, by some means, and to school ourselves to a greater patience and tact in dealing with him. Fortunately, Alio and some others of our men prevailed upon him to come back. The old man squatted once more in the kitchen, and took some food in company with those of our men who were Danakils. His companion had returned to their village.

Not one of us slept that night, except at brief and troubled intervals. Another day in the ravine seemed to promise a disastrous termination to our enterprise. That illusion, when for half an hour we had believed ourselves to be free, and on the point of departure, was the worst experience that had befallen us.

Morning dawned: the beginning of our third day at Gaiara. We approached Suni Maa, hoping that we should find him

more reasonable. He repeated again and again that we must remain where we were, and that he would not give us a guide. We took refuge in our cave from the rising sun. A man came with four sheep, and Suni Maa informed us that one of the animals was a present from him to us, and the other three were for sale. The old man, at the same time, informed us that his countrymen took a particular pleasure in putting strangers to death after they had eaten heartily of meat — whether purchased, or presented to them by their hosts — or immediately after they had arrived at a water-hole. The reason was that at such moments men are happy, and the Danakils like to slaughter their victims when they are happy. Suni Maa obligingly added that we might accept his own present of a sheep without the slightest hesitation, for he was now an old man and near to death, and his ideas were different to what they had been in the days of his youth.

What was it that worried the withered mind of that old savage, causing him to pass from spells of apparent conciliation to utter intolerance? It was the third day of our detention, and already we had spent four hours in senseless discussion. With us in the cave, were Abdul Kader, Suni Maa, Alio, and the man who had brought the sheep. The remainder of our men, and the local natives, were congregated about the kitchen, as we called it. There was nothing to cook, and our minds were engaged with anything but thoughts of eating, but it had become the custom to refer to the quarters of our senior servants as the kitchen.

At last, a faint hope revived within us. In order to try the effect of something new on the old man's mind, we had spread out on the matting many sheets of paper, maps, and opened books. We informed Suni Maa that all these things were important documents, relative to our high standing. The old man was amazed, as well he might be, and exclaimed: 'You well say that with such abundance of papers you may travel anywhere in the world. Go then; but bear in mind that out there in the desert there may be men waiting to attack you.'

Neither can I defend you from the cunning and deceit of certain men of my tribe, who may offer to lead you to the water-holes, but who will take you to death instead, leading you hither and thither in the wilderness, until you drop fainting with thirst, so that they may possess themselves of your belongings. And beware that you do not accept presents of food, for the Afar will kill you after you have eaten of his bounty. Such are our customs. Now go, if you believe that you can find your way alone. I tell you that you shall never save yourselves, and leave the land alive.'

Our imposing array of papers had inspired the old man with a sort of half-disbelieving respect.

'And here what are we doing then,' I said, 'unless approaching every minute nearer to death? We want at least to die beyond the confines of this ravine.'

'You can go,' said he, 'but I shall not give you a guide.'

Now Alio intervened, saying: 'I will conduct them back to the Aussa, for I must retrace my steps thither. I have already come too far, but I did so because I thought that Suni Maa was the wise man into whose hands I might have delivered these good Farangis. They are seeking neither blood nor riches, but only wish to acquire knowledge, after the manner of their race. I know they treat all with kindness, for I have now travelled with them for many days.'

The old man approved Alio's suggestion, that we should return to the Aussa with him, but I said, 'No, Suni Maa, we shall not return by the way we came. Alio is a good man, but his way lies to the south, while ours is to the north. Our misfortunes must rest upon your head. Now tell us where the water-holes are to be found.'

'Were I to tell you, alone you could never find them.'

Suspicious Danakils passed along the torrent-bed. They seemed like black demons against the dazzling whiteness of the chalk cliffs. Then they passed from sight, going into the ravine in order to post themselves again at the water-hole. No issue to our difficulties appeared before our fatigued minds,

and now it was noon on the third day. Alio begged us to travel with him back to the Aussa, and from thence to Tajura. In spite of the wisdom of his counsel, from the point of view of prudence, we remained obstinate, making a pretence that we rather preferred to die of thirst in the desert, so long as we went forward.

We decided to release Alio, as there was no object in his remaining any longer at Gaiara. We counted out to him the sum in thalers to which he was entitled, and added a liberal bounty to the amount. We also handed him gifts of cotton cloth, coloured kerchiefs, millet, tobacco, tea, coffee, and beads. He was now possessed of a small fortune, according to his own ideas and those of his countrymen. He kissed our hands many times, in gratitude and happiness. While he was packing the things in a bundle, which he proposed to carry on his shoulders all the way to the Aussa, I wrote a letter in French to the Anfari, telling him how well satisfied we had been with Alio's services. I then read it out, pausing after every few words, in order that Abdul Kader might translate them. I noticed that Suni Maa was listening with rapt attention. If we had only known what to do in order to make that old man's brain work to our advantage, we should have felt as overjoyed as though we had found the Philosopher's Stone. The writing of the letter to the Aussen Sultan had certainly made a great impression on the old skeleton. Among other things, we had said that we were not returning with his servant Alio, and to the inexperienced mind of Suni Maa, such a declaration doubtless conveyed the impression that our plans were finally settled, and our minds irrevocably made up. We would even venture alone into the desert! Doubtless, our show of will-power impressed the old man. We told him again that all the world lay open to us, for the papers we carried entitled us to go everywhere, and even the great Anfari had had to acquiesce in our entering his territories. Once again, we proceeded to spread out all our sheets of paper, our maps, our books, our letters. We again pointed out to him stamps, and

the impressions of seals. These things he regarded with a wholesome awe. Now and then he would stretch out a long thin finger to touch some paper. Occasionally he would even feel emboldened to place, with deep respect, all four fingers of one hand on a document. He told us he had never seen a sheet of paper with writing on it in his life before. He had never before seen anyone write. We gave him an old letter, telling him he might examine it without fear of damaging it. This amused him so that he grinned all the while he was handling it. Then I showed him my passports and pointed out the head of many a great Negus, printed on the visa-stamps which it contained. Among others, I showed him Menelik's lion, impressed with a rubber stamp at Addis Ababa. All this filled the old man with admiration.

Suddenly an idea occurred to me. I had a receipt for a fee, paid on the registration of my passport at Addis Ababa. I would give it to the old man, telling him it was a personal letter from the Negus Neghesti addressed to himself. I found the strip of paper. Printed in one corner of it was Menelik's lion, or the Lion of Judah. I pointed out to Suni Maa that the lion on the strip of paper was exactly similar to that impressed on the small coins, sub-divisions of the thaler, and on other documents which we had with us. I then solemnly and ceremoniously placed it in his hand.

'This important document will protect you in the presence of Yassim,' I said, 'if he should request to know why you let us pass through the country.'

'But who is this paper of government for?' asked the old man.

'For you,' I said, 'so that you may the better explain all about us to Yassim. It is the writing which the Negus Neghesti sends to the wise Suni Maa.'

The old man looked at the receipt with wide eyes, turned it over, fingered it, turned it over again, and finally rose, holding the paper all the while with extreme care. He held it with the tips of his fingers, away from his body, as an object of tremendous import.

his looked veritable sticks. He bent down with an effort, to pick up his lance and waterskin, and slowly straightening himself, he motioned to Alio and the man who had brought the four sheep to follow him. They retired to a distant nook outside the cave, and there held a whispered conference; but we could hear no sound of what they said.

Noon was past, and we were exhausted by the heat, and the strain which our nerves were still called upon to support. It had now gone on for three days, and the thought that we could ever be free and carefree again seemed utterly fantastic. We sat looking at our papers, which lay spread on the matting in the middle of the cave, but we hardly saw them. We had not the heart to exchange a word. Each one knew what the others were thinking, and there was nothing to say. Abdul Kader looked at each of our faces once, and then bent his head too. I cast a glance at the quivering atmosphere before the incandescent chalk cliff opposite to us, and at the calcined torrent-bed below. The sun was forcing its way slowly, relentlessly, into our place of refuge. Rosina threw himself down on the floor of the cave, as though seeking oblivion from despair, and Pastori with half-shut eyes still gazed on the ground, his head supported by one arm, which rested on the box in which we kept our papers. I buried my face in my hands, and sat motionless. Suni Maa, and his followers, and all that they had done, and were still to do, now seemed inevitable, a combination of beings and circumstances fore-ordained. Our doom was rapidly approaching. It was written.

Though a great patch of glaring sunlight lay hot on the floor, nobody moved. We had even lost the will to flee from that brutal fire, to the shelter of our afternoon quarters. This was the third afternoon on which the sun had sought to hound us out of the cave. This time we retired further into the stifling interior . . . and waited.

Presently, Suni Maa came stumbling and climbing over the stones towards us. He reached the edge of the cave, and looked in. I said to my friends, 'Now for the verdict.'

sumed the mask of indifference, as the eyes of all three of us studied, with covert eagerness, the black faces before us. But there was nothing to be seen there. They were three faces of stone, faces of carved basalt, black, petrified. Even Alio's gave no sign. Suni Maa squatted down painfully. They were all in now. Alio and the sheep-drover sat one at each bony elbow of the old chief. I watched every movement they made, every gesture, with burning anxiety. The suspense was nerve-racking. The old man took a drink from his water-bag, adjusted his loin-skin, and scratched his parchment-covered ribs. The other two men maintained sullen expressionless faces, looking on the ground in order to avoid meeting our eyes. What was the meaning of this forbidding aspect? Were the three merely concentrating their minds on what was about to be said? Or, were we lost? The old mummified half-alive skeleton drank again. That done, he took from his lap the receipt, and his long withered arm stretched out, like a mechanical apparatus, to drop the paper on the central mat. He raised his thorax, tried to hold himself erect, and his raucous voice uttered a few uncouth sounds.

The interpreter translated: 'Suni Maa says you may go. Menelik's letter is good.'

We made Abdul Kader repeat the words, for they seemed incredible to us. Alio confirmed our acquittal. He had suddenly become his former self, and seemed more attached to us than ever. We could scarcely believe that we really were to leave this infernal place. It was too extraordinary to be quickly realized.

Suni Maa would not accept any of the presents we had offered him. Money, coffee, even firearms, all were refused. He took only a coloured kerchief and a length of cotton cloth, no more than we might have given to a girl in return for a small skinful of milk. He desired only to retain the Abyssinian receipt. His suspicions seemed to have entirely vanished.

'Now you may depart,' said he, 'but wait for the moon to rise, for the heat of the day is too fierce for you to travel in.

Load all the water you need, from the upper pool. Nobody shall prevent you.'

Thereupon, he ordered the sheep-drover to carry his orders to the men on guard at the upper pool, to allow us unrestricted access to it.

He added: 'I shall give you a reliable guide, to lead you to the water-holes in the desert, and on the stone lands, and to conduct you by the pass over the fire-mountains. You shall pay the guide, for without him you would never be able to find your way out of our country.'

The old man named the amount which the guide was to receive as wages. It was much less than we had paid Alio, as Suni Maa must have known, for he had assisted at our settlement with the Aussen.

The old man now pressed us to accept one sheep as a present, and to buy the other three. We thanked him, but declined both offers, and gave a present to the shepherd. Then Suni Maa rose, shook hands with us, and walked away without saying another word to us. He gave his final instructions to the guide who was to accompany us, and then passed on with some of his villagers and was no more seen.

The news of this happy issue from our troubles had reached our men in an instant. Now Settie and Abulker came hastening up from the torrent-bed, to express their delight, and to receive our orders for departure. It was then only an hour past noon, but we said we would leave at once, in case Suni Maa should change his mind again. With extraordinary speed, our men turned each one to his task. Several of them went with the new guide, to load water at the upper pool. It was a pleasant relief to us to have this clear water, after having drunk for three days of the foul dung-heap drainage in the lower pool. Other men turned to saddling the camels, and loading the poor beasts, which were well-nigh exhausted in a temperature of 167° F. These were terrible hours of feverish exertion, in conditions where mere breathing seemed to demand an effort, but at three hours after noon we moved out of that awful

oven, in which we had been incarcerated for such a seeming eternity. Besides sixteen goatskins, and a kidskin for each man, we had filled our six water-bottles and two tins with water to their utmost capacity.

Until this moment, we had deemed it madness to think of venturing out in the direct sunlight at this time of the day, in that place; but we were now too overjoyed at our escape to be overborne by mere physical conditions. Three sick men, and the insane, rode on camels. The remainder were all on foot, including us three Europeans. We had, in fact, marched on foot since the start of our journey, nearly three months before.

We left the mouth of the ravine, and came out on the open desert. Here, we parted from Alio. We were sorry to lose him, for, after an inauspicious beginning, he had proved himself a highly valuable servant, and a mutual attachment had sprung up between us. He kissed our hands, and saluted all the members of our party. Then, proud of having successfully performed his mission, and bearing our gifts and our letter to the Sultan concerning him, he turned away, holding his Silver Baton upright before him, and set out to retrace his steps to the Aussa.

We turned to the north, sinking our feet at every step into the burning sand. The blinding light, and the throbbing heat-waves, made of the atmosphere a sort of incandescent haze. Sky and sand were of one colour, the horizon unseen, by reason of the haze into which both merged and mingled in one quivering glare. The air came up hot from under us, thrown up by the burning ground. We seemed to be walking, shoulder-high, in some fluid thicker and far more resistant than air. In half an hour, our feet were sore, by reason of the heat in the ground, and our delight at finding ourselves free began to subside, before the awful reality of this desert. Our faces felt as though they would burst; our nostrils smarted; our eyes were sore and dry. We were oppressed by a tormenting dizziness, which seemed beyond human endurance. We thrust our

hands in our armpits, seeking for some little coolness, if only at our finger-tips, but there was no relief.

A hot wind arose, and raised up clouds of sand to increase our torment. As the wild gusts struck us, the sky was darkened, and in a few minutes we were in the throes of the khamsin. The air became less fiery, and the flying sand was so thick that considerable quantities of it could be caught in one's hand all around. The wind's violence was such that we could no longer stand. Yet there was to me something friendly in this turmoil of the elements, for it raised a further barrier between us and the Biru savages.

The camels knelt down, with their hindquarters towards the storm, and stretched their necks along the ground. Thus they remained motionless, while the sand heaped itself against their backs and flanks. The men also crouched down on the ground, each drawing his rags about him, and covering his head. The mules appeared to be paralysed with terror, and merely stood in the howling chaos, pushed hither and thither by the fury of the wind. At every lull in the storm, the men, who had lost the mules, or been dragged away with them, would hurry to catch their animals and return to the caravan. No hand could hold them when the storm raged about them, and pushed them bodily before it, but the men in charge of them had no thought of losing such valuable animals.

Sometimes, in these lulls, a fearful anxiety seized us, when the horizon became visible for a moment, for mules and men, and even camels, had disappeared. Then moving creatures would be seen in the trough of a dune, or outlined on a crest, at some distance. Then would we run to them, and bring them back, before the whirlwind burst upon us again. The sandhills were displaced under our very eyes: all that we could see about us was in motion. There were seen waves, breakers that rolled onward like wind-blown water. The sand was whipped so fast from their crests that within a few moments the troughs under them became filled, and new waves rose up where they had been. The process was continuous, and the effect was that

of a slow-rolling sea. Although we remained in the same place, we found ourselves sometimes in a deep trough, and at other times on the summit of a wave. The former occurred when the sand was blown away from under us, and in the latter case we raised ourselves, a few inches at a time, as the sand was piling all around, threatening to bury us.

Like us, our animals could not remain still, but rose and fell, as though they had indeed been floating in the sea. Although they crouched close against the surface, in order to oppose the least possible resistance to the wind, yet they were continually having to extricate themselves from the drifted sand.

For three hours we remained stationary under the khamsin.

Night had fallen by the time we were able to resume our march. Immediately as the storm abated, the heat seemed to have increased again. We were covered with a coating of sand. We went on labouring over the yielding dunes, staggering uphill and sliding down, sinking deeply at every step. Sometimes, to relieve ourselves for a moment, we would hold on to the rope of a camel-saddle, but those hours, during which we crossed the sands, were some of the most terribly fatiguing of all our journey.

At last, even this trial came to an end, and we found ourselves on firm ground. The sands tapered away on a floor of chalk, broken by outcrops of basalt. In the dim light, we could see the contrast of black and white. To our left, we could still detect the chalk cliff which extended northward from Tio, marking the boundary between the Harak desert and the chalk terraces. It was some 150 feet in height at this point, and it cut across the heavens with a level line. Presently, the chalk gave place to basalt, a cliff of which stone ran in a northerly direction, as if in continuation of the former. The volcanic rock rose sheer from the chalk floor, as though it had been built by men's hands. These igneous materials having been forced up in a molten state through vertical crevices in the neptunic strata, had solidified in that position. With the wearing away

of the soft matrix of chalk, in the course of centuries, the hard basalt stood forth, and even now showed few signs of weathering. At the most, a few piles of broken rock lay, here and there, along the base of that great primeval wall. A little later, as we continued on our way, a second similar wall loomed out of the darkness on our right. It ran parallel to the other, and we found we had entered a perfect corridor, floored with white chalk, and walled high on either hand with black basalt. The ramparts were some 250 feet high, and appeared to be about sixty feet thick at the top. The corridor between them was several hundred yards in width. The thickness of the walls was seen where they had been broken by a more recent lava-flow, which made a low obstruction in the floor of the corridor. Through the gaps thus made, we could see what lay behind the walls: there were more walls, all running in the same direction. It was a series of parallel bulwarks standing on the plain, with defiles between them.

Soon after we had passed the lava-flow, the right-hand wall came to an end. We were exhausted with the heavy journey through the storm, and we now decided to call a halt. The animals were unloaded, mats were thrown down on the baking hard ground, and, as soon as we had issued one canful of water to each tired man, we sought a few hours' oblivion in sleep.

The name of the series of ramparts was Arbale Narrows, and the place of our encampment was known as Adda Marmariti. The utter silence of the place, its lunar remoteness, made it a haven of peace and tranquillity.

ARBALE NARROWS TO THE EGOGI LAKE

Our sleep was of short duration, for as soon as the moon appeared from behind the black wall, we rose, loaded the animals, and moved off again. The basalt here formed an even floor, free from dangerous fissures, and we advanced at a fair speed.

When the dawn broke, we had already reached the highest point of the basalt and lava confusion, and now, as we began to descend the other side, our footsteps amongst the loose stones made sounds as of shards of broken pottery. In some places, heaps of clinkers and ashes stretched to the horizon. Of a sudden, we saw the perfect outline of the Afdera Volcano. Our guide told us that as recently as some sixteen years previously, the mountain had erupted, adding still further disorder to those chaotic regions. I had seen the volcano, eight days before, from the summit of a hill above the Galaito ravine. Around the immense squat cone stretched extensive fields of basalt and lava. To the south lay the ramparts of Arbale, and, further away, the white Harak desert. To the west, the surface was covered with lava, as far as the eye could see. In this petrified sea, there rose a spent volcano called Gali Damalike.

Our new guide kept us informed of the names of all the physical features in our line of march. He was, in fact, the

best guide we had fallen in with in the whole course of our journey. His name was Assen.

Presently we came to a step, a sheer drop of a hundred feet in the basalt flow. Our unfortunate camels struggled down that precipice, more like mountain goats than soft-footed beasts of the desert. We were obliged to relieve them of their loads, and lead them down separately, the men carrying the loads down after them. Two hours were spent in negotiating that precipice, but there were no accidents.

Shortly afterwards, we came to a second cliff, where, once more, we had to unload the animals. On the brink, there was a tomb, with a flat stone, placed on edge, at the apex of its turret. Our guide told us that it was the tomb of a chief called Muhammad Daza. It overlooked the wide Sodonta Plain. The descent of this cliff proved to be more difficult than the former one, and the guide ran about, hither and thither, to find the best way down. At last, we decided to bear away to the north-east, although this would have the effect of lengthening our march. There was no alternative, however, for only in that direction was it possible to manage the precipice. It became clear to us that had we been without a guide, we should never have been able to pass such obstacles as this, without employing a fatal amount of time. Even as it was, we were constantly oppressed with the torturing thought that Suni Maa had told us that the first water was six camel-marches from Gaiara. We had planned to reduce the waterless interval, by forcing our pace, so as to cover the distance in four marches. This was made doubly necessary by reason of the fact that there was a complete dearth of pasturage throughout the whole of the distance. Our attempt was a desperate one, and it was vitally necessary to push on before our energies should be exhausted. If we came to that condition before reaching the water, then there would be nothing for us to do but wait in the desert for death to overtake us. As will be easily imagined, every hour spent in making a detour caused us untold agony of mind. We had taken two hours in descending the first cliff, which a man

on foot, without encumbrances, might have negotiated with a few leaps.

The men who watched the camels took the utmost possible care to ensure that they did not strike against the rocks, or become jammed in them, for fear they should burst the waterskins which they carried. These were wrapped in several thicknesses of heavy sacking, to defend them from such impacts, and to diminish loss by evaporation, as well as to protect them from the friction of the ropes by which they were secured to the saddles. Whenever the sacking became soaked with water, so that it began to drip at one corner, then one of our men would take that corner in his mouth, and suck it as he walked beside the animal.

Our guide had great difficulty in finding a way for our camels to descend to the Sodonta plain, for, said he, pack animals had never passed that way before. We were obliged to make a detour, and presently we found some broken places in the cliff. These gave access to a series of ravines, by means of which we at last succeeded in reaching the plain below. This was covered with a crust of mud, curled and blistered into small pieces, which crumbled to powder under our feet. The boundless expanse of sand which stretched to the north was broken by crusts of crystalline salt, and outcrops of chalk and basalt.

At noon on that torrid day, we found some cavities under a ledge of chalk, and here we halted and unloaded the animals. Then we flung ourselves into the shade of the hollows. Our poor animals crept under the ledge too, where they managed to find partial refuge from the sun. The mules came after us, into the deeper parts of the cavities. These unfortunate creatures whinnied imploringly for water, but we could not relieve them. As for ourselves, the spectre of drought kept us awake, and anxious to be gone once more on our way. As soon as the sun began to sink towards the west, we rose, loaded the beasts, and moved off across the desolate wilderness again. In places, lava covered the old sea bottom thinly, over a wide area. Only

a very fluid mass could have spread so far, and so thinly, over the ground. The hard surface was so uniform that it reminded me of roads freshly tarred. Presently, however, cracks began to appear in all directions, and then the lava assumed a rolling surface, as though it had solidified while rising and falling in waves. Further ahead, where lateral forces had played more directly on the mass, it had become broken and upheaved in flags, showing the ancient sea-bottom underneath.

On making another detour, we came to a place where the upturned stones had been cemented again by a new lava-flow. This had formed a level floor, out of which the older stones protruded like decaying tombstones, set at all angles. Between these latter, we threaded our way, bruising and cutting our elbows and knees against them. The camels suffered far more than we did, for it was terribly difficult for such ungainly animals to pass through the narrow spaces between the tall and here tabular rocks without coming into contact with them.

Presently we came to yet another cliff, which overlooked the Realu Plain, to the south-east of Mount Afdera. The southern flank of the great volcano consisted of five successive steps, pointing to the occurrence of five separate eruptions, each one slightly less copious than the one which preceded it. At the apex was a small truncated cone, which looked like a toy placed on that huge massif.

We succeeded in finding a way down the precipice, by a passage so narrow that, in some places, the animals could scarcely push their way through. The sun had now set, and the oncoming darkness was making our progress more difficult. Frequently, our fear-stricken animals would stop and try to back away from some suspected danger. Then we would run to them, and push or pull them forward, encouraging them with words the while. Reduced, as we were, after weeks of toil and privation, we had yet to make strenuous efforts continually, when we would have given almost anything to be able to throw ourselves on the ground, and forget that we anv

longer existed. Osman, tied on a camel, and with his head sunk on his breast, wailed dismally. The demented Johannes uttered, now and then, great wild cries, which increased the horror of the scene. By the time we touched the sandy soil at the foot of the cliff, it was almost dark. There was not a sign of life on the wide plain which stretched in front of us.

We now directed our march to the north again, keeping the Afdera on our left hand. On coming to some troughs or hollows in the ground, which afforded protection from the wind, we halted, and flung our things on the ground. Here we slept like corpses, amongst the clouds of sand which the wind whirled about us. Even this poor respite was not permitted to us for long, for presently the moon rose. We got up to take advantage of its light, and thus began our fourth waterless march.

The light of day found us still plodding forward, and as it quickened, two truncated cones emerged on the horizon ahead of us. Assen told us they were known as the Two Arbas. Further to the north, another imposing volcano showed its magnificent crest. This was Mount Amarta. From its base radiated many small cones, in regular chains. Some time later we saw signs of sparse vegetation, in the form of scattered tufts of spiny grass. In a low-lying place farther ahead, we saw, to our immense joy, some coarse palms, mere bushes. They were poor derelict trees, a few fan-shaped sprays of fronds on short stumps, crooked and barbed, but they were the first trees which we had met with for many a long day. To our desert-weary eyes they seemed miraculous.

The grass became more general, and thorn-bushes appeared. Suddenly, hardly believing the evidence of our eyes, we saw a man. He ran away when we approached him, but our guide called out to him, and succeeded in arresting his flight. We asked him to inform us where the local water lay, since the presence of vegetation implied that there must be water in the vicinity. But the man refused to tell us anything. We offered him presents, but our advances availed nothing. At

last, he admitted that heavy rains had recently fallen, and that the water-holes were certainly not dry. This was pleasant news, but we should have been even better pleased if the savage had himself shown us the nearest water-hole, instead of leaving us to solve the riddle ourselves. Assen used all his powers of persuasion, as did our own men, and we ourselves waved presents before the eyes of that poor suspicious creature, but he absolutely refused to give us the information we wanted. Suddenly, he turned on his heel, and walked away for a few paces; then, as if seized by a new idea, he broke into a wild run, and disappeared amongst the low volcanic outcrops.

We now had barely sufficient water to last us for the next twenty-four hours, and, if we spent any appreciable length of time in searching for the water-hole unsuccessfully, we should find ourselves in a fatal plight. We, therefore, placed ourselves in the hands of our guide, and told him to lead us in whatever direction he thought best. Presently, we met two more Danakils, and having exchanged the news with them, we asked where they had procured the water which they carried with them in their kidskins. But they declined to tell us. We were careful to refrain from threatening these natives, and resumed our march, trusting that the water which still remained in our goatskins would be sufficient to last us until we succeeded in finding a well.

The ground became rocky again, and soon we were in the midst of another lava-field. The sharp edges of the broken stones were set at all angles, and our camels fell continually in the pit-falls between them. The rough expanse undulated in domes and troughs, waves and ridges, the result of lateral pressure while the rock was still in a pliable state. Some of the domes had been broken by subsequent disturbances, and their vaults lay gaping, half filled with the fallen debris. The curved flagstones, which had resulted from these fractures, presented two distinct surfaces: one was blistered and rough, and the other was comparatively smooth. The latter was the under-side, that which had lain in contact with the desert

sand, and the rough side was that which had been uppermost, exposed to the action of the atmosphere while solidifying. All this rock seemed to be of recent origin, for there was little sign of weathering in it.

Here, another of our camels cast himself down, and had to be abandoned. For several days past, the animal had followed the caravan without a load, or even a saddle. It was one of the last of those which we had purchased at the outset, at Awash Station. It fell into one of the subsided domes, and could not rise again. After giving the faithful beast a farewell caress, I took a rifle from Wolde Jesus and shot it. The lava-field was called Kadu.

We entered a narrow valley at the foot of the Afdera, and presently came close to the base of the two cones called Arbas. These latter we put on our left. The valley, which became wider as we advanced, ran between cliffs of chalk, intersected at intervals by basalt outcrops. The white salt-impregnated ground glittered and crumbled under our feet, as we followed the valley downstream. Now, to our great happiness, we saw more palm bushes, and then the sandy and chalky soil was seen to be wet in places. We hastened further, and soon found two natural hollows, containing clear limpid water, a sight, in those circumstances, more delightful than we had ever seen before. We threw ourselves down in order to drink, and found the water was extremely brackish. Yet we drank deeply again and again, and laved our hands and faces.

We camped under the low chalk cliff, where the lava-field which topped it projected in an overshadowing ledge, protecting us from the sun. Here we lay down, turning our faces to the cliff, so as to escape the glare of the white valley. We formed a line of bodies, shrouded in rags, hugging the base of the cliff. But, even from here, we were soon driven away, for the sun gradually invaded our refuge. We rose up, and went to look for another place, where the shadow was increasing. We found what we sought, but the ground which was now in shadow had been exposed to the full power of the sun until

after noon, and was now breathing out its great stores of heat. The temperature was 163° F.

A little later, I climbed with Pastori to the top of the cliff. Looking towards the east, we could see clearly, for the sun was sinking behind us. We were immediately struck by an entirely unexpected sight in that direction. A mile and a half away, there was an immense pearly expanse, of which we had till now seen no sign. My friend and I agreed that this could be nothing else but an extensive sheet of water. We could see silvery waves upon it, and at the nearer edge there was a perfectly white glistening deposit of salt. We hastened to call our guide, who informed us that what we saw was indeed a lake, and that it was called Egogi Bad.

We descended without delay, and having told Rosina of our discovery, we walked down the valley (which was called Adaito) in the direction of the lake. As we advanced, we found the pools of brackish water grow more frequent, and most of them were bordered with vegetation. Some palms dotted the watercourse, and these were taller than those we had seen earlier. The ground between the pools was encrusted with salt, and next we came to a point where the vegetation entirely ceased. Beyond this point, the salt crust was general, and all was barren and dead. The ground became soft, and we sank in mud up to our ankles. We turned away to a slight eminence, from whence we could view the scene. The waves on the lake were perfectly clear, and formed regular corrugations on its surface from side to side. The shore described a great curve to the south, and then turning north-west, was finally lost in the haze. Behind the shining salt deposit, there was a belt of stranded foam, and beyond this the salt water. Yet the sight of it was inexpressibly refreshing. Our eyes, which had looked upon calcined rocks and sand for so long, seemed never to grow tired of staring at that great half-concealed sheet of water.

There was an islet to the north-east, and, beyond it, the crest of Mount Amarta rose above the haze in which lay the

further shore of the lake. At our shoulder stood Mount Afdera, balancing its neighbour across the water. The littoral was marked by an outer belt of grey soil, on which grew scattered palms and bushes.

As the sun set behind Afdera, a red light was shed on the opposite mountain, and this presently changed to violet. The waved surface of the lake looked like a rosy floating veil. Then shadows fell upon it, and, travelling quickly up the slopes of Amarta, they left its crest alone illuminated. In a few moments more this light too was quenched.

We descended from our point of observation, astonished at the unexpected spectacle, and returned to camp, sinking our feet again in the mud, until we came to the Adaito dry torrent. In several of the water-holes, we now observed schools of little fishes. Using a bed-sheet as a net, we caught about four pounds weight of these creatures. Their fins were hard and needle-sharp, and it was difficult to take them with one's hand. I also shot some doves and partridges, as they came to the pools at dusk.

That night, we had prepared for us a sumptuous meal of fried fish, roast birds, and boiled rice, and these things were provided for our sick men also. But when it came to actually eating the viands, we found we had little appetite, so most of the dishes remained practically untouched. We experienced a constant nausea, a bitterness in the mouth, and the only relief we craved was to drink. Here we had salt water only.

Our guide, Assen, was happy that we had had such good fortune, and since the pools we had found must have been the result of rain, he felt sure that a certain rocky recess which he knew of would also contain some rainwater. This pool, he assured us, was not very far distant, and its water was always sweet. It was his main objective after leaving Gaiara, for the brackish pools we had found here in the Adaito were merely the accidental result of recent rain.

The next morning at dawn, we moved off in a north-west-erly direction, keeping at a distance of some two and a half

miles from the edge of the lake. By this means, we avoided the separate basalt headlands, which extended from the flank of the Afdera towards the littoral, for we were able to cross above the line at which they divided into independent ridges. Beyond the headlands was the mud flat.

Assen was without doubt the best guide we had had the fortune to engage in the whole course of our journey. He was as quiet, modest, and kind-mannered a fellow as one might hope to find anywhere. So even-tempered was he that he never caused us the least anxiety or misgiving. We relied upon him, as the crew of a ship relies upon its pilot in a difficult passage. I feel that Assen cannot be sufficiently praised, and I devoutly thank Providence that we were blessed with the company of so good and tranquillizing a man in our crossing of the terrible Harak desert, after the nerve-racking experiences of Gaiara.

We proceeded on our way over gentle undulations, and from the top of every rise we looked with wonder on the lake, which lay spread out below us. The outline of Amarta rose, clear-cut, from amongst the horde of small cones at its base. The mist lay like a gossamer sheet, resting on the pinnacles of the little cones. The rays of the rising sun began to shoot up and out, from behind the great volcano, which presently was edged with gold. Long shadows appeared in the valleys. Then the first fiery direct rays flamed out from the flank of the crater, and the surface of the lake turned from opal to rose and yellow. Soon, it was flashing a great blinding reflection into our eyes, and the nameless islet, a pearl in a huge shimmering shell, was almost lost to view.

Huddling our clothes more closely about our heads and necks, we pushed forward on our way, while the grim Afdera, towering above our left shoulders, was lit in every detail, hit square by the inexorable sun.

LABEDIN WELLS

LONG before noon, we came to the mouth of a ravine, where we halted, and unloaded the animals. Assen, and some of our men, penetrated further into the chasm, and soon we saw them gesticulating excitedly. We ran upstream after them, and, on climbing over several great steps of rock, we found a beautiful basin, some eighteen feet in diameter, which contained pure sweet water. The place was called Labedin, a name I shall never in my life forget, and the watercourse, coming from the west, flowed into the Egogi Lake.

We all gorged ourselves with the crystal-clear water, and then Pastori and I went farther up the torrent-bed, scrambling amongst the great boulders which blocked the way. Our surprise and delight were renewed when we came upon a second and even larger pool, as wholesome and clean as the first. We called out the news to our men, and it was good to see them all begin, with happy eagerness, to scramble up the basalt steps. Even the sick men tried to follow their comrades.

Pastori and I, taking Assen with us, went still farther, and at last reached the top of the basalt terrace, whence we could see the waters of the Egogi Lake glittering in the sun. There was a curious hard white glare in the north-east, and our guide informed us that this was caused by two extensive salt deposits, called Alganda and Burtale. He also told us that six generations earlier the site now occupied by the lake formed the

base of a great volcanic massif, which had gradually sunk below the level of the surrounding country. Waters had collected, and filled the hollow thus formed, but one ancient summit had remained high and dry, an islet in the middle of the lake. It still bore the remains of old dwellings, and was a favourite resort of the evil spirits of the country.

Abulker now set up his kitchen close to the lower pool, and Pastori and I lost no time in undressing and plunging into the upper one. I also had my baby crocodile brought up, and placed him, in his now damaged tin, on a submerged rock, so that water might circulate freely in his cage. It was useless to pour water into his tin while on the march, for the jolting of the camel quickly threw it all out again. After the tin had become damaged it would in no case hold water. I used to place a piece of wet sacking inside, and to this the little reptile would cling.

As Pastori and I were playing in the water like schoolboys, we observed some small toads in the crevices of the rocks. We forced some of these to come out, and caught them in our hands, as they jumped into the water. On giving them to the baby crocodile, we found he demolished them eagerly, so we provided him with an extensive banquet of them. After a time, I managed to catch the only large toad we could find, and put it in the tin. But the crocodile appeared to be frightened of it, and having placed himself as far away from it as the size of the tin allowed, he remained perfectly motionless as though asleep.

I spent most of the day in the delicious cool water of the pool, but at last Rosina came up to tell me that all was ready for our departure.

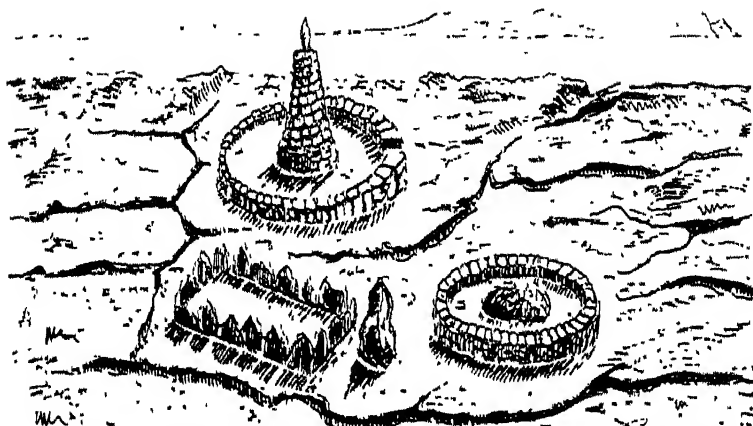
Assen had told us that we had, immediately ahead of us, five waterless marches, in order to cross the deserts called Hedaitoli and Olelailo-Hela, parts of the immense region known as Rorum, which extended to the north-west. We therefore had the prospect of at least twenty-five hours of actual forced marches through those deserts. Every goatskin had been

filled, but nevertheless the volume of water which we could carry was now less than it had been, for many of the water-bags had been damaged and torn, and the rough-and-ready means taken to repair them had lessened their capacity.

Our camels had had scarcely anything to eat since leaving the Aussa, and they were in a pitiful condition. As to our mules, it seemed to be by some miraculous agency that they continued to remain alive. To keep them from dropping dead, we used to give them, occasionally, a handful of flour, mixed in a few pints of water. Naturally, they went unloaded, merely carrying their saddles and a few water-bottles.

Had there been a little pasturage about the pools of Labedin, we might have remained there advantageously for a day or two, but as there was not one single blade of grass nor even a dry tree for our animals to gnaw, we were obliged to hasten away. Two hours before sunset, we were on the march again, for the moon rose late now, and we could not travel in such difficult country wholly without light. We had now again to make two marches in the twenty-four hours: one beginning as much as possible before sunset, and continuing until it became too dark to go on any longer, and the other beginning at moonrise and lasting until an hour after sunrise.

Happily, the ground in this place was sandy, though broken by volcanic outcrops, and in spite of a wind that arose and tormented us with clouds of dust and sand, we kept steadily on our course. In the dim light of evening, we passed close to a burial ground, where I counted over sixty tombs. Assen explained to me that the men here buried had belonged to a tribe which had inhabited these marches before the Egogi Lake was formed. Their descendants had scattered far and wide, and it was rarely that any human being was now seen in these parts. Assen himself had travelled here only once before. It was many years ago, when he was a boy. The tombs were better built than those we had seen further south, and I marvelled to notice that one of them was rectangular in form, instead of conforming to the universal circle of the country's ar-



Hands of groups at 60 after Labedin on way to Ato. First example of right angles being employed.

TOMBS ON THE LAVA-FIELDS NEAR LABEDIN
including the only rectangular building met with in the Danakil country



View of Adera from the June 14th Mt. A. Doum Palms the first we saw

MOUNT AFDERA, FROM ALO: DOUM PALMS IN THE FOREGROUND

(See page 330)

chitectural efforts. It must have been designed by some Danakil who had been to the Red Sea coast, and become impressed with the rectangular buildings to be seen there. I had not seen a square building for months, and, as I placed my hands on this poor tomb, it put forth, and enveloped me with, something of that artistic appeal which is exerted by the noble works of Greece and Rome.

Night had fallen on the boundless desert, and I hurried after the caravan, which was already at a distance over the level sand and lava.

Soon, to our dismay, we came to a wilderness of rocks, which at once reduced our speed to less than half what it had been. Yet we were hardened to such experiences by now, and were prepared to fight our way, inch by inch, through the obstacles. But a misfortune, with which we had not before been afflicted, now befell us. By reason of the roughness of the ground, two of our camels stumbled and fell, striking their loads on the rocks. Three goatskins were immediately split by the impact, and in a few seconds their precious contents were lost amongst the stones. We mournfully reflected that almost a fourth part of our entire water-supply had thus become lost to us. We silently adjusted the saddles, and tied the ripped skins on them, while the spectre of thirst stood by, grinning at us. We had marched forward for some time in dejected silence, when Assen spoke.

'You arrived at Gaiara very fatigued,' said he, 'and your animals were more dead than alive. Nor could they have been otherwise, for, besides carrying your water, they were burdened with your sick men. Neither was there food for the strengthening of your faithful beasts. From Gaiara, I have now conducted you, without deviation, across the Harak desert and the Realu plain to the wells of Labedin. But now our advance becomes dangerous. Not only is the way becoming more difficult, by reason of the rocks, which will cause an increase of many hours in the time necessary to reach the sure water-hole I know of, but we have now in a single moment lost

much of the water we brought with us. Every drop of the full load of goatskins which we took from Labedin was necessary to enable us to reach the distant pools, and since that has now been reduced by one-quarter, our success is uncertain. Make your decision, then, masters, either to go back or to go forward. To continue to the north may result in the death of all of you, for your men are no Afars, to exist without water in the desert. I might save myself, but it would be impossible for you to live. On the other hand, to retrace your steps would not be free from danger, for it is not possible that all of you would reach Gaiara alive. Most of your camels would perish on the dry marches between the Egogi Lake and Suni Maa's ravine. Reflect also on the scanty chances you have of returning from Gaiara to the Aussa.'

I answered Assen: 'If our lives depend on no more than three goatskins, we will go ahead without hesitation. We have no intention of returning to the Aussa. God is Great, and He will help us if we help ourselves. We will continue on our way to the north.'

Our men followed us without a word, devoid of will-power or ideas.

Assen now recommended that we should deviate somewhat to the west, in the hope of finding water in a pool which he knew of in that direction. For, said he, with our now diminished supply, we should hardly reach the wells which were our main objective. We turned in the direction he indicated, and after midnight we stopped at a place which our guide called Alo. We were glad to be able to discern in the darkness a number of thorn-bushes and doum palms. Assen went away with some of our men, to look for the water. After two hours, they returned with the disastrous news that no sign of a water-hole could be found. These tidings sounded like a death-knell. We had come hours out of our way, to no purpose, and had thus much reduced our already slender chance of reaching the northern wells. We tried to find hope in the thought that in the morning, by daylight, Assen would have a better chance

of discovering the object of our search. He had said that it was in a very small hollow, invisible at the distance of a few yards.

Now it was about two o'clock in the morning, and amidst our nervous dozings and anxious wakings, the small Massowa Danakil, Abdulla, crawled close to my camp-bed, and whispered in terrified tones: 'Master, there be men calling from afar off!'

I held my breath, listening, and indeed, in the lofty silence of the desert, I could hear the sounds of human voices, faint yells coming from so great a distance that they could hardly be detected. A sudden apprehension of danger seized me. Voices in this remote desert, and at night! For scores of miles around us there was nothing to support life: who was it that was now moving through these plains of death?

I aroused my friends, and soon we were all listening intently. The voices were growing more distinct; their owners were travelling towards us. And now other cries, slow and prolonged were heard in a different direction.

Assen spoke low: 'All keep close together. Have the animals rounded up, and kept near at hand. Make no noise, and do not even speak. These are Uagarat, or Azabugalla, or Alamatat; I cannot tell which. But keep on the alert, for they are plunderers, looking for us to attack us.'

Assen was much alarmed, even for himself. Belonging, as he did, to a distant tribe, he would not be likely to escape the general massacre. It is not the custom of these plunderers to leave any of their victims alive, and escape in the open desert would be impossible. The stillness of the night was broken at intervals by those terrifying voices. Now Assen could distinguish the actual words, and Abdul Kader translated them in a whisper, as we stood round him.

The voice said: 'I am a good man . . . I am dying of thirst . . . I have lost my way . . . my people are no longer with me . . . I am dying of thirst . . . a good man . . .'
There were long pauses between each two sentences.

Sounds came from the opposite direction also, but they were still indistinct.

Assen whispered a warning: 'Do not believe that voice. The Uagerats and their like have treachery in their blood. They cry out that they are dying of thirst, as a ruse to discover where those they intend to attack have camped. One or two of their number will come forward for this purpose, while the main body remains watching at a distance, under cover of the night. Do not speak or move! They are bloodthirsty beasts, worse than hyenas. They have kept watch on us, and have chosen this place to fall upon our caravan.'

Meanwhile the awful sound of that voice continued to come over the still desert, cutting through the night with its accents of agony: 'I am dying of thirst . . . I am a good man . . . my camel is dead . . . my people have forsaken me . . .'

Assen, sitting on the ground, passed his hand nervously over his cheeks, his neck, his mouth. He motioned to us to keep still, not to stir or to whisper. Low on the flank of the Afdera, the crescent moon appeared, casting a faint light over the barren country. To judge by the sounds which came to us, two columns of savages were in motion, one to our left, and the other to our right. The former was the closer. Occasionally, friendly clouds would float across the moon, and the moments during which the surrounding desert was blotted from view were moments of intense relief to our strained nerves. But when the clouds passed on, and a flood of white light was cast over the desert, we felt that not only would the savages detect our tracks in the sand, but that they could not fail to see us and our animals, crouching there amongst the scattered bushes.

Assen said: 'Our fortunes are waning: but Allah is Great, and we may yet be saved. The danger is critical, for these plunderers spare no human soul. They are travelling in two columns. Keep your hands on your rifles!'

If those savages had gathered on the desert, as Assen supposed, expressly to attack us, then there was very little chance

of our escaping them. They merely needed to stampede our animals, and they would have us helpless in their hands. Our men could not have carried the waterskins, nor the provisions, nor the sheets and mattings with which we made a little shelter from the midday sun. All these things were bulky and heavy, and even a burden weighing a single pound becomes an unbearable load in such a climate as we were in. And if Assen, our good reliable guide, had been killed, or forced to surrender to the enemy, what should we then have done? We could not have found our way to the pools, four stages to the north. Even should we succeed in beating off the attackers, and returning to Labedin, our animals would certainly die there, for there was nothing for them to eat.

The savages were slow to begin their work. We wished they would be quicker, for in the heat of fighting, we should at least escape from our thoughts. But perhaps they were as cunning as they were bloodthirsty, and had determined not to risk their lives in a pitched fight, but to keep us loosely surrounded, until the heat and our lack of water did their work for them. This would be easy, for they were doubtless in overwhelming force, as against our dozen men. All they had to do was to watch us drop, one after another, and finally close on the loot we carried.

Now the moon was definitely hidden, and as time passed, every moment seeming an hour, the distant voices became even fainter than before, and then we heard them not at all, for some time. We did not know what to make of this atrocious silence. Had the savages discovered us, and were they now concentrating their forces? Suddenly, that lugubrious voice cried out again, very clear this time. Another voice answered it from a great distance. So, then, we were still surrounded!

More time passed, and then the faint distant sound was heard again. Then complete silence fell. Craning our heads, bending our ears, to every murmur that the hot night air brought, we continued to listen until, completely exhausted, we fell asleep, one after another.

At the first light of dawn, we were all awake again. The terrifying voices had not been heard again. Each man cast his eyes around the scene — deep-sunken lustreless eyes. We looked at one another, silently. Assen was not with us!

Where had the man gone? Run away? No! We could not believe that he had betrayed us, but nothing is impossible in this world. Our minds were torn with doubt and dread.

We looked at our remaining goatskins of water. Then we bestirred ourselves, and issued a beggarly quantity of water to each of our men. They had no words, their eyes hardly seemed to see, their minds were no longer capable of thought. They sat in dumb resignation. In a few hours, the first of them would drop, and would not rise again. Nevertheless, we began to load the animals. We intended to resume our march to the north: we had no intention of dying in a state of inaction. It would be better that each man should drop out by the wayside, when his time came to die: less gruesome for the later survivors, than to see the dead in a circle round them. No! While there was still strength in us to move, our wakeful European minds would continue to urge us on to self-preservation, with the insistent cry of Forward!

We had nearly completed our loading, and had already tied the sick men atop, when, from afar, we saw a speck moving towards us. As it came nearer we saw it was a man, waving his arms. It was Assen! Were his gestures meant to indicate the presence of danger, or were they signs of joy? He covered the last distance running. Now his voice could be heard, yelling and yelling as we moved toward him. We heard the words: 'Water! Water! Allah is Great! I have found the well!' We rushed towards him, and he fell on the ground, panting as though he would burst. That final run had been too much for him. We gave him time to recover, and then all followed him, animals included, to the water. We took the camels loaded as they were, but the baggage which had not yet been loaded was left lying on the ground. No creature of us thought of anything but water.

After going some distance, we came to some stunted doum palms. Assen pointed to a hole in the ground, amidst some stones which were strewn there. It was so small that even a yielding canvas bucket could only just be forced into it with a lance-butt. Everybody drank his fill, and, with patience, we managed to water all the animals.

By this time, the sun had risen high, and it was impossible to think of marching. We therefore settled ourselves to remain where we were, until the evening. The camels were turned loose, to graze on the thorn-bushes which grew sparsely about the water-hole. Abulker rigged a matting awning for himself, and, taking needle and thread, proceeded to repair the three damaged waterskins. Every man fell to his proper task, and to dressing his sores. We intended to leave for the north in the evening, unless the plundering tribesmen made their appearance. It was possible that they were lying hidden in the vicinity, for they never attack save at earliest daybreak, or at night.

We could not remain still, however, but roamed about, searching for the tracks of the raiders. In the course of these activities, we passed round a group of doum palms, and saw a man lying on the ground, doubled up under a bush some thirty yards away. We gripped our rifles and clustered together, searching amongst the bushes with our eyes, and listening tensely. The man seemed to be dead, but that too might be a trick of the plunderers. They might have placed a dead man there, in order to draw us into some trap. Assen cautioned us to be watchful, and proceeded to unsheath his big knife. In his left hand he held his lance, poised horizontally, level with the shoulder. Now we all approached the motionless man, and pushed him over with our toes. He was unconscious, but not dead. Assen said: 'This man belongs to a peaceful clan, which inhabits a district four days' march from here. He is not a plunderer, but he is nearly dead with thirst.'

We raised the man to a sitting posture, caught his nose, opened his mouth, and poured water down his throat. The contents of a full kidskin were emptied into him, and then we

had him carried to our camp by two of the servants. On passing round another group of doum palms, we saw a camel, which had evidently died a few hours before. On its saddle there were a few rags and two empty waterskins. We took these things, and carried them away with us. When we returned to camp, we stretched the unconscious man out on some matting, in the shade of a thorn-bush, which we had also covered with matting, and the lower branches of which we had cut away, turning it into a sort of large umbrella. The man was an old Danakil, so thin that it almost scared one to look at him. Having seen him made as comfortable as our limited means would permit, we went forth again to resume our search for the tracks of the raiders. This time we went in a different direction, and, at a few miles' distance from our camp, we came to numerous marks in the sand. They must have been made recently, or the wind would have obliterated them. The tracks led away from our place of concealment, from which it appeared that the plunderers, on failing to find us, had been constrained by lack of water to hurry away to some wells known to them. The Alo water-hole would probably have been considered too small for the needs of a large party. Allah, said Assen, had saved us, for if we had not burst those goatskins on the previous day, we should not have left the northward trail and turned to the west in search of water. In that case the plunderers, who had doubtless seen us leave Labedin, would have overtaken us. 'Maybe those wicked men are at Labedin now,' said he, 'but they must be tired, and are not likely to leave again in pursuit of us in the midday heat. If they will remain but one day at the pools, we shall be safe, for we will leave here this evening and march all through the night, and will put so much desert between them and ourselves that they will be unable to overtake us. Allah has saved us! Allah is Great!'

On returning again to camp, we took another look at the half-dead Danakil. He seemed to have regained a little life, as the result of having water constantly poured down his throat, but he was still unconscious. Presently, Abdul Kader came to

tell us that he had recovered, and had begun to speak. We commanded that he should be brought to our shelter, and had him propped up between three camel-saddles, arranged in the form of a letter U. Some of our men held him, to prevent him from falling. He opened his eyes, and looked about him vacantly. Then he looked at his hands, his feet, and his legs. Having done that, he dropped his eyelids, and his head bent down to the shoulder, as though his life had left him again. We gave him coffee, but to that old palate it probably tasted no different to the water we had given him before. He opened his eyes again, however, his mouth gaping, while one of our men held his head straight. Dismay seemed to seize him now, and this, at any rate, was a sign of returning consciousness. Slowly and feebly, he answered Assen's questions, and Abdul Kader translated the conversation to us.

The old man said he had come from a great distance, and that he had been forced to set out on his journey to escape a raiding party. He had left his village in company with another man, and one woman. On the fourth day, their supply of water had come to an end, so he had remained under a doum palm while the other two, who were young, had gone to look for a water-hole which they knew to be near. They had left their only camel with him, so that if he revived he might have ridden forward to meet them as they returned to him with the water. He saw them depart, and then fell asleep with exhaustion. When he awoke, he found they had not yet returned, so he rose, and proceeded to hobble in the direction which they had taken, leading the feeble camel by its halter. Night came on, but he saw no trace of his two companions. He knew the Alo water-hole was close at hand, but his little strength was dwindling fast. It was his voice that we had heard in the night, but his friends had not answered him. 'If you, who have arrived from another world, have not saved them, as you have saved me,' said he, 'they are surely dead, for their anxiety to find the water has carried them beyond the mark.'

After a time the old man said: 'What will you do with me?'

We told him that if he liked to remain with us until we met with a friendly tribe, with whom he could stay, he was welcome to do so. He looked at us, and bent his head in acquiescence. Later, he told us that he had heard the plunderers pass near him in the night. He could not understand why a large party should follow two destitute men and a woman into these waterless deserts. But now that he saw us, he realized that they must have had news of our caravan, and were really on the look-out for it. After looting his village, they had gone to Labedin, and he seemed astonished that we had had the sagacity to turn westward into the desert, and thus escape our pursuers.

ALO TO THE ADOGURA PLAIN

WE had the old Danakil carried to the kitchen, where he revived more and more. First a handful of flour was given him, then a cup of coffee, then some bread, and so on, until his strength returned, and he became healthily curious as to his surroundings. His astonished eyes now beheld cooking-utensils such as he had never seen before, boxes, chests, fire-arms — twelve rifles, all stacked together, must have seemed to him an immense armament — and other articles, the use of which he could not imagine. Never had he seen such strange people as he found around him on his return to consciousness. It must have seemed to him that we, and our appurtenances, had dropped from the sky, for his mind could never have grasped the real reasons of our coming thus suddenly into his life. I envied the man such an experience. Nothing in any way comparable to it could ever astonish me, short of waking to find myself in another planet.

Evening approached, and, although the khamsin was rising, we proceeded to load the animals. It was necessary to move on from Alo. We had refilled all our goatskins, but even so, there could be no lingering by the way, for there lay four waterless marches ahead of us. The resuscitated one, seeing our camels to be almost exhausted, proposed to walk on foot. We appreciated his good feeling, but as his own weakness caused him to lag behind, we had him flung up on a camel.

Our way led across an expanse of lava, mixed with sand, and progress was made more difficult by the clouds of grit which were continually being blown against us. When we had marched almost to the limit of our endurance, we halted amidst the volcanic outcrops, the hollows of which were filled with sand. Here we issued water to each man, and then everyone rolled himself in a piece of matting, or a sack, and so lay down.

We rose long before the moon appeared, and as soon as its pale light was shed upon the earth, we resumed our march.

When the sun rose, we had our first sight of the Hertale volcanic group. Mount Ummuna, an immense flattened cone, towered high above all the lesser features of the chain. Behind two small cones, which barely rose above the horizon to the north of us, a thin layer of smoke was floating in the air. This was the first sign of present volcanic activity we had seen.

Two hours before noon, we halted near some thorn-bushes, and unloaded the camels. The sand had come to an end, and the ground was of hardened clay. Here we spent the remainder of the torrid day, being about midway between Alo and the next water-hole.

On the approach of evening, we resumed the march, and would have kept on all night had there been a moon, but the darkness stopped us. We hoped that the end of our next march would bring us to Marka, the territory of the Blind Chief.

Our rest was an intermittent dozing rather than sleep, a half-forgetfulness of anxiety, which the slightest sound disturbed. It was a relief to us, therefore, to begin loading the animals again some two hours after midnight. By this means, we should be enabled to move forward on the appearance of the first light of daybreak. When we went to drive our animals up to the loads, we found that six of them were missing. Settie was half-distracted with the loss. The animals had broken their tethering-ropes. Our men were now so exhausted that it was excusable if some of them thought they had tied the ropes tightly, when, in reality, their little strength made it impos-

sible for them to do so at all times. It was also possible that, in the darkness, badly worn pieces of rope had been employed.

What irked us was that we now had to wait until near dawn for the moon to rise, before going in search of the animals. In the meantime, they were doubtless straying farther and farther away.

When at last the dawn began to break, we saw that we were in the middle of a wide plain, dotted sparsely with thorn-bushes. It was at least a consolation to us to see even this poor vegetation, but the bushes made the task of finding our strayed camels more difficult. We found several lines of tracks on the ground, and we were obliged to separate into three parties, leaving only the sick men in camp. We agreed that before noon we would all return again to camp. If the missing camels could not be recovered by that time, we should be obliged to leave in the evening with those that remained, abandoning some of the baggage where it lay. We now had sufficient water for only twenty-four hours. Taking our water-bottles and kidskins with us, so as not to be obliged to return to camp through thirst, we set out to make a thorough search. If any of the parties were to find some of the animals, they would fire a shot, in order to inform the others.

After two and a half hours of searching in the heat of the sun, we heard several rifle-shots. The number of reports indicated that more than three of the camels had been found, and accordingly we all moved back towards camp. On arriving, we were delighted to find that Rosina's party had brought in four of the missing animals, and our satisfaction was complete when Settie returned with the remaining two. They had been at large for eight hours, and had they not been so exhausted, they would undoubtedly have strayed much farther than they did.

Although the sun was now high, we decided to march on without delay. While loading the beasts, we looked for the resuscitated savage. Our sick men, who had remained in camp during our search, told us that although he had attached himself to one of the search-parties he had soon sneaked back into

camp alone. After he had hung about for a short time, they saw him march away to the northward, taking his trusty goatskin full of water with him. On hearing this, Assen said: 'That sor of the devil was not worth your pains in saving him. Instead of helping to search for the camels, he has gone off alone, for fear he should suffer thirst if he remained here with us. The old hyena has trotted forward to deliver the news to the Her tribe, so that his skin may be spared, as a messenger of marvellous tidings. But we shall benefit, even from his thanklessness.'

Abulker, the one-eyed Massowa Danakil, spoke up: 'And what manner of benefit may we expect to derive from a savage like him? He did not even know what *timbaco* was, until I gave him some to chew. And now he has rewarded me by stealing half the ball of *timbaco* which I left amongst my things, when I went to look for the camels.'

Assen, calm and serene, answered: 'You have not then noticed, Abulker, that for several days past we have met no one. It is clear that the people are afraid to approach us. Now this ungrateful Afar, whom we have saved, cannot but say that we were good to him. You will find that, as a consequence of his going ahead to proclaim the news, the people of Marka will not flee at our approach, but will come to meet us, without fear. Therefore, even from the ungratefulness of that savage, good will come.'

As we advanced farther north, we found that the vegetation grew ever thicker, and before long we came amongst numerous tufts of spiky grass. This was the beginning of the grassy plain of Her, in the Rorum region. Our starved camels lowered their heads, and tore at the thick tufts, and had we not urged them on constantly, they would have come to a halt, and remained grazing. The mules gorged themselves ravenously.

We travelled ahead, and now Assen pointed out to us with his lance a distant group of huts, a real village. Before long we were delighted to see a herd of cattle grazing. These were the first signs of settled and peaceful conditions which we had en-

countered for three weeks, since leaving the Awash. Our happiness, after the grim experiences we had been through, was unbounded.

At last we arrived at the village, called Matahala, and Assen had not been mistaken in supposing that the inhabitants would come forth to greet us. Some thirty people, almost the entire population, watched our arrival. Women and children stood in clusters outside their miserable huts. These last were of the usual Danakil sort, pieces of matting thrown over a few bent sticks.

Assen hurried forward, and stood in the centre of the huts, and all the menfolk stepped towards him, rubbed hands, and proceeded to exchange the news. Presently they all approached us Europeans, bowed deeply to us, and whispered words of greeting. Surrounded by our new acquaintances, who announced our arrival with yells, we walked towards the village. Meanwhile, there moved from the opposite side of the group of huts another cluster of people, coming to meet us. In the centre of these, an elder led the Blind Chief by the hand. Some of his escort carried rifles, others lances. The chief was a small old man, of a kindly and quiet bearing. His open sightless eyes were like opal-grey pebbles set in his bronze face. His body was draped in a white sheet, and he bore no weapon. His low voice, and concentrated attention, seemed to exact instant obedience from his followers.

The chief kissed our hands, and we placed them on his shoulders as a sign of friendship. He then said that if we needed anything, he and his people were ready to help us. He proposed to have some huts cleared out for our use, but we tactfully declined this, saying that we preferred to camp near the water-hole, beyond the village.

The water-hole was a ditch, a long natural furrow in the clayey soil, some ten feet deep, and two or three feet wide at the bottom. It was muddy and disgusting. Both men and cattle walked along it, stirring up the mire continually. The people trampled and drank and wallowed there, just as the cattle did.

Men, women, children, goats, and a few camels crowded in the water, standing in it, and sitting in it, while thousands of doves sat cooing around the brink. When any animal had finished drinking, or wallowing, it crawled up the bank, and began to graze again. However, we had lost a good deal of our fastidiousness, after three months in Danakil. It was good to see our camels and mules, not only drinking their fill, but grazing to the top of their bent on the abundant grass. One of the poor mules, however, was too far gone in privation: the abundance of grass had come too late to save his life.

Our men delighted, whenever the occasion permitted, to make our camp look as important as possible. They now arranged our tent, and the various boxes, in such a manner as to convey to the natives of the village the most profound impression of our importance. These natives were easily moved to wonder, and they soon stood about with dropping jaws, staring at our marvellous possessions, and the orderly arrangement of everything. Our wise servants knew that a good and impressive account of us had preceded our arrival at this place, and they were anxious that, in everything they did, our importance should be made manifest. There was a strong touch of pathos in the sight of the good fellows, exhausted as they were, striving their utmost in everything they did to present an impressive front to our hosts.

We planned to remain one or two whole days at Matahala, so that our animals might regain some of their strength, by grazing to their hearts' content. Our men also were in urgent need of rest. The people of the village were perfectly friendly, and there were fresh milk and meat to be had.

Before long, the Blind Chief came to pay us a visit, bringing with him a present of sheep and goats. We were glad to accept these, handing him suitable gifts in return. Unfortunately, the chief's advent gave a greater degree of courage to the crowd. Instead of remaining at some distance from our tent, which was the focus of their curiosity, they now approached, until they stood in a close ring about it and us. They watched with mi-

nute attention while we ate our midday meal. There is nothing unnatural in this: we ourselves find something attractive in the sight of strange animals being fed. But it is so much more pleasant to be the spectator than the performer. The spectators stood two and three deep around us, closely packed, and we went through our meal in an atmosphere of the most intense interest. We must have struck those Matahala savages by the speed with which we ate, if by nothing else. Our table was quickly cleared away, and then coffee was served to the chief and the elders, as well as to ourselves.

While we sat conversing with these guests of ours, through Abdul Kader, some of the villagers, who had gone away, returned with goats and sheep and milk, which they offered to us. Later in the afternoon, when the heat had abated, we ordered that the boxes of gifts should be opened. We then distributed beads and tobacco to the populace, reserving coffee and sugar for the savages of quality.

In the evening, a very great chief arrived, one whose sway extended over the Blind Chief and his followers. He was old, and completely bald. He said he was sorry to be late, but he had only received news of our approach that morning. He had immediately set out to meet us, not waiting even to drive with him goats and sheep to present to us. These gifts should reach us on the morrow, he said. Naturally, we had to give him solid presents in exchange for his kind intentions.

We and all our men found an abundance of the food each preferred, whether meat or milk, with which to recruit our strength, and, after many days and nights of restlessness and wretchedness, all slept soundly once more.

As soon as the sun rose behind Mount Ummuna on the morrow, the crowd of Danakils gathered in greater force than ever, and fairly hummed around us. The Blind Chief, and other prominent men, came to see us again, and spent the morning in our company. The ring of watchers round our tent remained solid, after some contention had occurred for places in the front row. When any member of the front rank was obliged

to go about his affairs, a strenuous scramble immediately ensued for possession of his vacant place. The flaps of our tent were raised, in order to allow the air to circulate more freely inside, and thus our every action was visible to the audience without. We sat with the Chief and his elders, for the most part, while Abdul Kader translated the remarks of both sides. It was plain that the unfortunate interpreter was longing to be with his friends in the kitchen. Every time he translated the almost meaningless prattle of some elder, he would look towards those comrades of his, who were laughing and making merry over the abundance of milk and meat. We hoped to resume our journey on the evening of that day, and were already looking forward with pleasure to freeing ourselves from the populace of the village, who were as annoying as horse-flies. They all demanded more presents, and most of them wanted their gifts exchanged for something else as soon as they saw that a neighbour had received an article which seemed to them more desirable than their own. What they seemed most to desire to eat was a handful of ground millet. They would have killed a man for a small quantity of that brown flour. Yet, judging by the good grass which grew in the district, millet might easily have been cultivated there. These savages, however, have not sufficient application to till the soil. It is as much as they can do to tend a few goats and sheep. The climate in this region also allows them to rear camels.

‘ This tribe,’ said the Blind Chief, ‘ was once seven hundred strong, but during the course of my life I have seen it brought down to fifty souls, and that is our number at present. It is the constant raiding which has reduced us. I myself was blinded in a fight, and I would have been slain had not some of my comrades rescued me in time.’

He held open the white sheet, and showed the great scars and gatherings of his flesh, where the steel of his enemies had ploughed his body. His tribe, he said, was now too reduced to withstand any but the smallest enemies, and when attacked,

they fled to caves and crevices in the rocks, or even to the inaccessible cliffs of the 'fire-mountains.'

A commotion arose in our kitchen. Abulker was threatening one of the villagers with a lance. We sent Abdul Kader to inquire into the matter. Presently he returned, and informed us that the villager had wanted to gain possession of a tobacco-ball belonging to Abulker. When our man had refused to give it to him, he had sprung at him, and seized him by the head, wielding his great knife over him. Abulker had managed to free himself, and had taken up a spear. The savage had then withdrawn. Abulker had grown civilized, though he was a Danakil, and he found the manners of our hosts somewhat abrupt. 'The best of the Afars is as the issue of a hyena and a jackal,' said he.

As we sat with the elders, we heard that the son of a Danakil chief whom they knew had recently assaulted an Eritrean frontier post, when he and his followers had killed all the garrison, numbering eight soldiers, and looted forty rifles — a priceless haul to such savages.

A villager squatting in the ring was pointed out to me. I had noticed that he possessed an unusually good rifle. This ruffian had gone to the Plateau to secure his weapon. He had travelled here and there on the Plateau, working a little, and then one day he had murdered an Abyssinian merchant, and stolen the rifle which he now held in his hand. He immediately fled into the desert, where he could not be followed, and returned to Matahala, where he was looked upon as a splendid fellow. And that rifle of his, said they, is never out of order. It is always ready for use. Some time ago, an Abyssinian who had strayed from his caravan, and lost his way, approached the water-hole. Some of the children showed him the water. In the meantime, all the men were hastening to see who the stranger was, getting their knives ready to slay him, as they went. But yon fellow shot him with his good rifle, before anybody could get near enough to stab him. So the prize was his, and all because of his excellent rifle.

Then we were told of the exploits of other criminals sitting in the ring: some of them hung their heads modestly, when their murders were made known, others accepted the honour more gallantly.

At evening, all the goatskins were filled with the muddy water of the ditch, which at least was not mineralized. Anything is preferable to that clear briny water of the salt wells. Assen, the best of all our guides, now left us to return to Gaiara, taking with him our thanks and presents to Suni Maa. The good fellow kissed our hands several times, bowed down, and muttered low words of respect and farewell. Then he took leave of all our servants, and everyone was sorry at his departure. The sight or sound of his name will ever bring us pleasant recollections. Two local men had been engaged to guide us to the north.

We found ourselves, here, the objects of a new respect, for we had acquired great prestige amongst these savages by our long and dangerous journey, and the many trials which we had succeeded in surmounting. We had come from the Aussa, that favoured spot, and had been the guests of Muhammed Yaio. The ten camels we had bought from the Sultan were there to be seen, and these savages constantly went to examine the five-pointed star which was branded on their necks.

Besides our two guides, we were joined by two relatives of the Blind Chief, and two men of a distant tribe who had been unsuccessfully searching for some strayed camels in the vicinity. These four expressed their desire to travel with us for the sake of the experience. Although their presence would act as an additional drain on our resources of food and water, we felt it necessary to permit them to accompany us.

At dusk we stood ready for departure, surrounded by the entire population of the village. We were on the point of starting, when the old man whom we had saved at Alo made his appearance. He had acquired two new kidskins, and, carrying these, he followed the column with infirm gait. We drove along with us three large sheep, and eight goats.

The grass continued for some distance beyond the village, but it gradually became more sparse. When darkness fell, we were obliged to halt, as we had come to ground which was broken by crevices.

We moved off early in the morning, but the Resuscitated One was no longer with us. On the previous evening he had been given his ration of flour and his water, like the others, but when the camp began to stir at dawn he had already departed. He had thought fit to steal a lance and a pair of sandals, to keep green the memory of his old acquaintances.

Keeping the five summits of the Hertale chain on our right, we continued steadily to the north. No smoke was visible in the hot air, for the sun quickly dries the moisture out of gases in an atmosphere such as that which hung over those craters. The last tufts of grass fell behind us, and thenceforward we marched on hard clay, which was next followed by sand. Basalt and lava began once more to break the naked landscape. Among the rocks, we found a small water-hole containing a little foul water. We refilled our water-bottles, and the men their kidskins, and all drank. The thought of saving, perhaps, two hours' supply, was quite sufficient to make us suppress our feelings of disgust. For upwards of three months, now, we had drunk bad water, impregnated with mineral matter and filth. We made merry at the expense of those careful travellers whose precious lives have to be preserved with boiled and filtered and sterilized water. We regarded it as singular good fortune that we had any water at all in the penury of Danakil. If we had had a filter with us, how often should we have had the strength to wait for water to come drop by drop through it, while we looked on half-mad with thirst! With the temperature at 158° F. in the shade, and more, one loses one's scientific prejudices and theories, and goes back to placing one's whole trust in God again. Dregs of water which, in Europe, one would not throw on a roadway, for fear of making it dirty, were measured out among us, in Danakil, as though they had been the contents of the last bottle of a life-sustaining liquid.

We presently found ourselves in a desert of sand dunes, amongst which lava outcropped frequently. At noon, the heat forced us to halt. It was 156° F. in the shade. The place, which was called Tabena, was about midway between Matahala and the next permanent water-hole.

No sooner had the heat begun to abate a little, in the afternoon, than we were on the move again. In these waterless countries, one feels a constant urge to go forward, to gain another mile, another furlong, a hundred yards, but on no account to relax one's efforts to advance.

As evening drew on, we beheld the Hertale volcanoes standing clear and grim in the limpid air. The great craters were ranked in a shallow curve, extending for fifty miles. It was an immense black terrace of lava, with five great conical crests, lying on the level white sands. The huge mass was entirely isolated, rising from the level plain of the Danakil Depression. The most southerly of the volcanoes was Ummuna. This we had already left behind us. A mass of dense smoke, like a flattened cloud, clung to its northern flank. This had evidently issued from a new vent. The crater itself appeared to be no longer open, for there was no sign of vapour rising from it. The next summit to rise on the platform was Hertale, a beautifully symmetrical volcano. From its apex, there issued a plume of smoke which rose, curve above curve, high into the sky. The next was a huge shattered mass of rocks, the Borele Ale. North of this, there was a strewage of cyclopean stones on the terrace, and then the fourth volcano rose high into the unmoved sky — Mount Gabuli. This was such a mountain as the mind inevitably pictures when the word volcano is heard, an almost perfectly symmetrical truncated cone, with a huge mass of vapour ascending from it. The last of the five was Mount Alu, a heavy squat mountain formed of three successive craters, one superimposed on another, showing that it had twice become extinct and twice burst forth into activity again. From one side of this volcano, at the top of the lowest step, there issued a heavy volume of smoke. The summit gave no sign of the most

Soon the whole was obscured again by the falling dusk, and shortly afterwards we halted on the desert in complete darkness.

Now, against the moonless sky, ruddy smoke cumuli hung motionless above the craters, whose lower slopes shone with a steady reflected red light. At intervals a lighter glare lit up the under surfaces of the vapour-plumes with intermittent flashes.

Devoutly hoping that no wind would rise to torment us, we settled ourselves to pass the night amongst the sand dunes. We were in the Adogura plain, at a point nearly opposite the centre of the arc described by the chain of volcanoes, forming what I have termed the Hertale Active Volcanic Group, about which previously only the vaguest of information existed.

We were the first whites to approach those five 'mountains of fire.' The approximate position of the single Hertale cone had been mapped, after a fashion, as it had been noticed from afar by travellers in Eritrea on the other side of it; and the existence of one more live volcano had been uncertainly reported, but erroneously placed. The presence on the earth's crust of the three remaining active volcanoes was hitherto absolutely unknown. Discovering such features was a reward for our trials. All the deserts and ravines, chains of hills and extinct craters, ranges of mountains and watercourses, waterholes and springs, lava fields and immense chalk terraces, salt deposits and other manifold aspects over a surface of twenty thousand square miles of land offered indeed a mass of discoveries sufficient to compensate for the indescribable efforts of an eight-hundred-mile infernal track. But beholding those five smoking craters was a momentous experience, unsurpassed even by that of finding our string of salt lakes.

There is a satisfaction quite of its own, at least for some people, in marching in front of the first camel of your caravan, to look around on landscapes where no white man's eyes have rested before. It offers a strange relief, a feeling that you are laying your hand on primeval nature as it issued from chaos, that, for a spell at least, you are a primitive of the primitives,

est agglomeration of humanity of this twentieth century. It is a feeling of being carried back to past geological ages when our world was still in the moulding, a sensation all the more forcibly brought home to one here in Danakil because of the utter barrenness of the country, the absence for weeks of signs of life, vegetable or animal, the tremendous heat speaking almost of the yet unsolidified mass of the globe, the penury of water, the constant risk of life as one struggles amid the confusion of the neptunic and plutonic rocks, indicating the collision of the brutal opposed forces of nature, fire, and water, here unpacified yet, as endless testimonials of recent and continued telluric disorders.

As we looked at the chain of volcanoes standing in the vast darkness, partly illuminated by the dull glare, we agreed that of all the discoveries we had made during our journey this meant to us the greatest reward.

TABENA TO FIA

WE departed at dawn, and, continuing across the sand for some distance, came at last to firmer ground. Signs of a sparse vegetation now began to appear; horny stubble and stunted bushes, which defied the wind-blown sand and the torrid sun to subdue them. Presently some doum palms came in sight. About their base a thicket of their own sowing grew, and amongst them a watercourse wound its way. We marched along the bed of this torrent for a short distance, when the Matahala guides, who were in the van, signalled that they had found water. We hurried to the place, and found in the torrent-bed a hole, which had probably been dug by the natives many generations ago. It was a shaft, some ten feet deep, and so narrow that a thin man could only just have managed to go down it and sit in a niche which had been hollowed out of one side at the bottom. The water was exuded from the lower part of the walls, and collected in the bottom, where at present it was some six inches deep. The liquid was thick and unpleasant to the taste, but, after our four dry marches, it was by no means to be despised. This was Hebehela, known as a permanent water-hole. We sent a man down with a bucket, and as soon as he had filled it, it was drawn up and emptied. We had to keep a man permanently in the well for the remainder of that day and the whole of the following night, for the water percolated from the rock very slowly. We calculated, however, that by

this means we should eventually be enabled to fill all our waterskins.

Throughout the remainder of the afternoon, we were tormented by a sandstorm, but this subsided at evening, and we were then able to discard the mattings under which we had lain for hours. In the clearer atmosphere, we could now see the Alu volcano, belching smoke in four columns close together. The Gabuli showed its usual beautiful plume, rising above the crater. Away to the west, the headlands of the Abyssinian Plateau were visible.

At daybreak, Pastori and I left Rosina and the caravan to travel on to the next water-hole, while we went to make a closer inspection of the volcanoes Alu and Gabuli. We took with us one camel laden with water, some unleavened bread, and ready-brewed coffee. Abdulla, Wolde Jesus, a camel-man called Ali, and two Matahala natives, were to accompany us. We arranged with Rosina that we would meet him again on the morrow.

Pastori and I now crossed the desert in an easterly direction, going straight towards the two northernmost volcanoes. We came to the lava platform on which all the craters stood. It rose abruptly from the sandy desert, and was as rough as any of the jagged rocky country through which we had passed in the course of our journey. To our surprise, there was a tomb situated on the edge of the lava. It was a small turret, and was called Anfeitale. Close at hand we found a cavity, wherein we sheltered as under the hood of a carriage. Another cave sheltered the camel.

Pastori and I, with Abdulla and the two men from Matahala, had determined, after a brief rest, to cross the lava, and approach as near as possible to the active volcanoes. Accordingly, in the afternoon we left, each man carrying about fifty pints of water. We also had a rifle and a camera. We instructed Wolde Jesus and Ali, who were to stay where they were until we returned, to be very sparing with the remaining water, as we should need it in order to rejoin Rosina.

We quickly realized the magnitude of our undertaking. The sun-heated lava was like a sea of pitch that had solidified in irregular waves and lumps. The tempest-beaten breakers of the sea were there, petrified and blackened in that infernal wilderness. Such was the country over which we crawled in a temperature of 167° F. The weight of water we were carrying aggravated our trials, and the lava ground, which had been absorbing heat for the last ten hours, now threw it out like slow scorching breath.

Sometimes, we had to descend as much as sixty feet, in order to cross funnel-shaped depressions, and then climb up the opposite side. There was seldom an opportunity of passing round the funnel rims, for there were many of them close together, separated by a wall too narrow to walk on. There were precipices and ravines in all directions. We wasted no time in searching for easy passages, but kept our faces all the while towards Mount Gabuli. Soon our hands and knees were cut and bleeding. Little Abdulla had a bad wound on one elbow, and one of the Danakils had cut open the calf of his leg in descending a steep place. The fact that these people were almost naked, exposed them more dangerously to the cutting rocks.

In some places, we saw patches of ground which looked like a floor on which tarred ropes had been stretched — each uniform piece lying exactly alongside its neighbour, all straight and even. Then there were rocks which looked like heaps of ropes thrown down in confusion, and others which resembled wet sheets, which had been twisted, or wrung, to rid them of water.

We stumbled as best we could over the tormented chaos of edges, and blades, and humps, never taking our eyes off the ground. Only when we were forced to pause a moment, in order to get our breath, or to re-bandage our hands, could we cast a glance at our surroundings.

Presently we were confronted with huge wide belts and ridges of scorix, lapilli, and clinker. Our feet no longer found any hold, as everything crumbled and fell away. A noise as of

broken glass and shards of pottery was heard under our feet, and an acrid dust arose, and filled our nostrils and our parched throats. The lapilli ridges proved more difficult to negotiate than anything we had previously encountered. Some of these ridges were sixty feet in height, and sloped steeply on both sides: the width of the top varied from a few yards to half a mile. In climbing these slopes, there was no foothold, and frequently, instead of climbing upward, we slid a dozen paces lower down. Often, we threw ourselves flat on the ground, in the endeavour to stop ourselves from sliding down when a wide patch of the slope began to move bodily downwards, bearing us with it.

As the sun began to set over the desert beyond the lava platform, we redoubled our efforts, in order to get as far forward as possible before nightfall. When the last glint of the sun had disappeared, the lava assumed a deathly aspect which filled us with dismay. It had looked fearful enough by daylight, but it now impressed me with a feeling of half-terrified awe. Darkness fell, and compelled us to come to a halt.

We could eat nothing, Pastori and I, and we drank sparingly, in order to husband our water. The lava beneath us was scorching, but we were too tired to think of standing throughout the night on our feet. There was nothing to be done but lie down, and turn over again and again, for it was impossible to keep the same part of one's body in contact with the hot stones for two consecutive minutes. Occasionally I would sit up for a few minutes, but only when almost in despair had I sufficient energy to rise to my feet, and stand for a brief space. The illuminated plumes of smoke, which rose from the craters into the night sky, reflected a red light on the slopes of the mountain. At times, a brighter flash would light up a part of the fearful fields of stone for a moment, when the glowing masses within the craters turned over, or great bubbles of explosive gas burst on the surface. Towards morning a faint wind arose, carrying sulphur fumes down to the region in which we lay.

At the first sign of daybreak. we were ready to march. and

still directing our course towards the Gabuli, we began again our painful scrambling. We had decided that after having got as close as possible to the Gabuli, we would return to the desert, not by retracing our steps to Anfeitale, where Wolde Jesus, Ali and the camel awaited us, but by moving due westward under Mount Alu. This would give us an opportunity of finding a water-hole in that direction which was known to one of our Danakils. We now sent the second Danakil back to Wolde Jesus and Ali, with instructions to lead them direct to the water-hole, and meet us there.

In the clear morning air, all the volcanoes stood sharply defined against the sky. We had advanced some distance, when we saw in a valley, which lay between the Alu and the Gabuli, several huge columns of dense smoke. The smell which came to us on the air told plainly that it was sulphuric anhydride. Happily, the wind soon veered round to another quarter, or we should have been forced to retire immediately.

We had now ascended to a thousand feet above the sand desert. In the valley between the Gabuli and the Borele Ale, we could see a large lake, which our guide named Maraha. Beyond it lay the immense dazzling Salt Plain of the Danakil Depression. Moving to the west, we passed close under Mount Alu, and distinctly saw its two active mouths.

When the real heat of the day began at eight o'clock, we each had about five pints of water left. Each hour would now be hotter than the one before it, and we had made a resolution to get clear of the lava terrace by noon. After four more hours of the most strenuous exertion, during which every man of us added several extra wounds to those of the day before, we managed to accomplish our object. At high noon, when the whole earth and sky shimmered together in a blinding glare, we trod once more the desert sands. But every man had drunk his last drop of water. Neither was there any sign of the three men and the camel who were to have met us here, nor of their tracks in the sand.

Without a moment's delay, we began to search for the water-

and moving about in its awful hollows and crevices, we at last found the place of which the Danakil had spoken. We saw before us a hollow, with a steep way leading down to it. We hurried down the incline, and came into a cave, where we groped about in darkness. In this place, fifty feet below the surface, it was pleasantly cool — a foretaste of the cool water of which we were in search. We came to the edge of the pool. It contained nothing but thick mud. In despair we dipped our hands into the mire, and, without wasting another moment, climbed into the burning sunlight again.

There was nothing to be done now but push across the desert immediately, in search of Rosina. There could be no waiting for the heat to abate. It was 167° F. To this day I cannot understand how we found strength to go on under that fierce glare, without the solace of an occasional sip of water. We were seized by the energy of desperation, and trudged mechanically forward, reeling and panting in the yielding, scorching sands. Two hours after noon, we came across the tracks of Rosina's caravan, which had passed by thirty hours before. We turned northward, following these tracks, and hoping they would lead us to the Garibo water-hole. After a time we noticed that the marks of feet were much closer together, and much trampling seemed to have taken place. The Danakil said the water-hole was close at hand, and shortly afterwards we found it — a cylindrical well, just wide enough for a man to descend. Eagerly we crowded over it, and looked down, but the well was as dry as the sun-smitten ground above. I think sheer panic seized us for a moment there in the empty wilderness. But at least we were in no doubt. We knew there was only one thing to be done, in order to save ourselves. We must continue doggedly moving to the northward, following the tracks, straining every nerve to come up with Rosina before death laid its claws upon us. Rosina had found this well dry, and so had been obliged to push on to the next one. If that were not dry, too, we might expect to find him waiting there for our return.

Indeed, after two more terrible hours which seemed like

centuries, we saw in the far distance Rosina's camp. We had no rifle with which to fire a signal shot, for we had left our weapon with Wolde Jesus, in order to lighten our burdens. We just continued to crawl grimly over the sand. But Rosina was on the look-out, and soon we saw his men running towards us, alarmed to see only four men instead of seven, and no camel. They had brought water with them! We had to tell them to restrain Abdulla and the Danakil from drinking too much, for their own sake. Soon Rosina arrived, and took charge of everything. We were assisted and almost carried into camp, and then, in the shadow of our tent, we told Rosina in a few words what had happened. After that, we slept until late in the evening.

On waking, we found that Wolde Jesus and his companions had not yet made their appearance. We felt perturbed at their long absence, but it was of little use to send out search-parties in the dark. We caused several large fires to be lighted, however, for there were bushes and a dry doum palm about our camp; and some time later we had the happiness of seeing the three men and their camel come in. They had been afraid to fire a rifle-shot, in case enemies should be attracted in their direction, for they were for a long time uncertain as to whether our fires belonged to local tribesmen or not. Wolde Jesus informed us that the Danakil whom we had sent to him with instructions had fallen into a crevice, and severely hurt his leg — indeed, he had arrived in camp riding on the camel. He had succeeded in dragging himself over the lava-field to Anfeitale, however. There they had mounted him on the camel, and proceeded to carry out the orders he had brought. On reaching the spot where we ourselves had left the lava platform, they had seen our tracks, and quickly realized what we had done. After that, they had simply continued to follow up our tracks until they had seen the fires. The three poor fellows were almost exhausted, for they had prudently and loyally saved as much as they possibly could of the water in the large goatskin left in their charge. Not knowing what might be the

need of Pastori and me, they had made extraordinary efforts at economy, and finally came into camp with the goatskin still nearly full.

At five o'clock in the morning, we departed from the water-hole, Mandelu by name. We were now accompanied only by the two guides, for the four men who had joined us of their own accord at Matahala now left us, saying they must return to their tribe. The whole of the sheep and goats had also been subtracted from our numbers, having been killed and eaten at different camping-places. Finally, we left on the ground at Mandelu a camel which had died there, taking with us the sticks of its saddle to use as fuel.

Soon after starting, we saw several ostriches at a great distance.

At the end of a good march, we reached a well called Waideddo, and sent a man down the shaft in order to 'milk' it as fast as the water percolated into the bottom in sufficient quantity. The water was highly mineralized, as is the case with most of the wells of Upper Danakil, and we should have much preferred the filth-impregnated water of the open ditches. This well-water, as in previous instances, gave one the most excruciating internal pains. We drank it in order to keep alive, but consumed as little as we possibly could, for every drop which was not exuded through perspiration but had to be expelled through the urinary channels meant a torture, by reason of the strange stricturing effect. One felt as though not drops of liquid one at a time had to pass, however painfully, but rough iron pellets tearing the tissues were being dragged through. We all preferred to go as thirsty as possible after such experiences in spite of the parched throat and burning body which needed water. Yet it often happened that a little unmeasured yielding to thirst by the men—excusable enough when we were near a well—made them knot themselves up in agony and yell in pain, rolling on the ground for relief.

In the evening Pastori left with two men, his intention being to get close to a sulphur deposit which we had observed to

the east, so as to be able to examine it next morning. I went with another party, to inspect a series of regular cones which had attracted my attention. These lay somewhat to the north of Pastori's objective. Rosina remained behind, to bring the caravan on to the next water-hole, where we were all to concentrate again.

I found the loose sand soon give place to a crystalline crust of salt. This continued for a long distance, and as the dawn broke, the ground looked exactly as though it were covered with a heavy frost.

There were no natives to be seen near the water-holes we now began to encounter, nor in the groves of doum palms, though both were said to be guarded with the utmost jealousy. The mouths of the wells, however much mineralized, were covered with fronds of the doum palm, in order to prevent the infiltration of sand. We realized that these water-holes might easily have been hidden by the natives, had they wished to impede our progress, and, since none of them approached, we left presents beside the wells as a mark of our appreciation.

The further we advanced, the harder and more heavily encrusted with salt the ground became. Mount Alu, the last volcano of the Hertale chain, had been left behind, but the lava platform still extended towards the north, until it sunk to a thin black line and was lost in the sands.

On our right now rose a solitary mountain, a spent volcano, called Kebrit Ale. Beyond it lay the small cones which had attracted my attention. There were ten of them, standing on a common platform. They were so uniform that they looked as though they might have emerged from the same mould. I climbed on the base, and from that point of vantage the Salt Plain opened to the north. The perfectly level surface of solid rock-salt threw up a blinding glare, farther than the eye could see, and a thick haze hid the horizon beyond that old seabottom. To the east, the Assale Lake sparkled in the sunshine. Its salt-saturated waters had deposited at the base of the lava terrace a broad belt of white crystals. A small island, called

Maraho Karum, rose in the centre, roughly separating the lake into two parts. More to the south, behind Kebrit Ale, there lay another lake, bounded on the south-west by the lava terrace of the Hertale group. This was the Bakili Bad.

The names of these lakes, the existence of which was heretofore unknown to Europeans (with the possible exception, by hearsay, of the Assale), were given to me by one of our Matahala guides.

On leaving the platform of the cones, I travelled fast across the plain, in order to rejoin Rosina, and came up with him just before he had reached the Sabba watercourse, where we had agreed to halt. In the torrent-bed, there was a water-hole called Fia, a deep cylindrical well of painfully mineralized water. There were a few low bushes in the surrounding country, but we had not seen so much as a bird, or even an insect, since leaving Matahala.

As we approached the well, we saw, to our extreme amazement, peering over the bank of the watercourse, a group of natives. There may have been fifty of them, and they remained there watching our advance along the torrent-bed, with much surprise and fear. The caravan checked slightly and all bunched together, but continued to march on. The sudden meeting with such a considerable number of men was not reassuring. But our Danakil guide, as we got nearer and he could recognize them, said: 'They are good people. They are Indertas, hewers of salt, and have hidden here for fear of the Afars. We shall glean useful information from them.'

We soon came among the good salt-seekers, who now looked upon us with wonder, as though we had sprung forth from the ground. It was nearing noon, and we hastened to pitch our camp and take shelter from the smiting sun. Once in the shadow of our tent, we invited the Indertas to give us their news.

FIA TO MASSOWA

ALTHOUGH the plain north and west of the Assale Lake bears a deposit of salt which may be termed inexhaustible, yet the various tribes on its borders fight continually for the right to work it. The salt is very hard, and is cut into rectangular bars, twelve inches long by one and one-half inches thick. These bars are known as *mollie*. They are used as currency in the Abyssynian Plateau, and their value increases the further they are taken from the source of the supply.

There is enough salt here to supply a large population for thousands of centuries, for it covers an area, probably, of two thousand square miles. In places where there are crevices, it could be seen to be as much as two hundred feet deep. The salt is perfectly compact, almost like marble. It looks like a frozen sea, which has been cut into in a few absolutely insignificant places at its edges. A man does not go into the middle of the salt plain for his salt, any more than he would go into the middle of a lake to fill his bucket with water. In spite of this abundance, the ferocious Afars are for ever fighting the Indertas, and fighting among themselves, for possession of the place to which we had now come. At the time of our arrival, they had come to terms, whereby the Afars were to have the sole right to take the salt for twenty-seven days in the month and the Indertas were to have the right for the remaining three days. The men whom we met in the Sabba were waiting for the

morrow, which was the first of the three days allotted to them, to begin cutting their salt. These Indertas tribesmen lived at a considerable distance. On the third day of their labour, some of their fellow-tribesmen would bring camels to take the bars they had cut to their villages, and thence to the Plateau. What astonished us most was to see again, after three months, a community of men who were capable of performing definite and sustained work.

The presence of those fifty men, however, meant that great demands were being made on the water at Fia. Fortunately, the prudent Rosina had had some of the goatskins filled before leaving our previous camp. We were thus able to issue drinking-water to our thirsty men, and then make arrangements with the Indertas to use the well by turns with them. They were quite amenable to reason when we gave them presents, and when they saw that we had no intention of excluding them from the water by force of rifles.

Pastori returned in the evening, and confirmed many of my observations of the three salt lakes.

At dawn the next day, having filled fifteen waterskins, we set off again. The view was bounded now, on three sides, by the Eritrean and Abyssinian chains of mountains, which converged on one another towards the north. Sometimes we passed over loose sand: sometimes the sand was cemented with salt, and at other times we found ourselves on the marble-like surface of pure salt. The last was deeply fissured. On approaching closer to the Abyssinian mountains, we encountered extensive beds of gravel, brought down by ancient rains. Ahead of us, a small hill rose in solitude on the Salt Plain. It was called Assale Hill. *Mollie* bars were being chopped by squads of the Indertas, close to it. They had some tiny huts, built with blocks of salt, close to their quarry. The roof of each circular hut was constructed of large slabs of the salt, stretching entirely across its diameter. All these blocks and slabs were well squared, for the men used serviceable hatchets in their hewing. These refuges were probably very similar in appearance to the ice

huts which the Esquimaux build to defend themselves from the severest cold, as these were a protection from the fiercest heat on earth.

At Assale Hill we turned north-west, and soon afterwards began to climb the lowest spurs of the Plateau. Presently we descended again into a ravine in the hills, where we hoped, by digging, to find water. The torrent-bed was full of gravel and large pebbles. We found signs of digging, but all the holes were dry. However, on going further upstream, we came across two places which, when we had deepened them a little, yielded water. The water was muddy, but to our great delight, it was sweet; and having found it, we decided to encamp in that place. The name of the ravine was Beliga.

From the crest of a hill above our camp, we had seen the Dallol Hill to the north-east, rising abruptly from the Salt Plain. That hill was to mark the end of our last march in Dañakil, and we expected to reach it on the evening of the following day.

Our plans were already settled. Pastori was to take the caravan to Makalle, a market on the middle Plateau terraces, lying on the caravan road between Asmara, the Eritrean capital, and Addis Ababa. There he was to sell the animals, and what remained of the stores, and pay off all our men. Rosina and I intended to make our way to Dallol, and from there to travel to the coast by whatever means presented themselves. We planned to go as far as Massowa together, and there we were to part, Rosina proceeding to his farm on the Eritrean Plateau, and I going to Europe by sea.

The next morning I awoke with a pang, and perhaps Rosina did, too, for we were now to part from Pastori, our comrade during three and a half months of adventure and hardship. In the afternoon, three camels were loaded with our belongings. Pastori had determined to accompany us as far as Dallol, before returning to the caravan at Beliga, and most of the men wanted to come too. We could not take them all, however, as they were wanted to keep watch on the animals and gear.

The good fellows, who had shared our privations and toils in the long and dangerous journey, kissed our hands, hugged our knees, kissed our feet, murmuring low words of devotion and farewell. With a last word, we turned our faces towards Dallol, and moved down the watercourse, followed by them all. Again we said good-bye: they reluctantly fell back, and a sharp turn in the channel separated us for ever.

We descended, following the dry watercourse, and at last emerged on the Salt Plain. That marble-like surface was here edged with a grey belt of earth and sand, which the Plateau torrents had flung upon it. Crossing this detritus, we stepped out on the pure crystalline rock-salt, towards the Dallol Hill. We were fortunate to have found the Salt Plain dry, for it had been rumoured amongst the natives that the recent heavy rainfall had made it impassable, by reason of the formation of swamps. Had this happened we should have been obliged to make a wide detour to avoid it.

The mountains were entirely obliterated by a dense white mist, and nothing was visible except ourselves and Dallol Hill. Presently we could see a second smaller hill, and between the two stood two columns of rock. As the sun set, the hills and the columns looked like masses of bronze, lit up on one side with a ruddy light. Their outlines were sharply defined against the violet-tinted sky, and under them the plain seemed to have turned into a great sheet of opal. The atmosphere to westward appeared to be laden with golden dust.

We could now detect some miserable huts on the hill, and soon after we saw people moving about. These last were natives engaged in obtaining potash minerals, which outcropped near the base of the hill. They came forward to meet and welcome us, astonished to see us coming from a direction from which none but Danakils, as they said, had ever come before. They had, however, been informed by the Government of Eritrea that three Europeans were expected to make their appearance from the southward. It was so long ago that they had supposed we had died, or gone another way. That which



DALLOL COLUMNS RISING ON THE SALT PLAIN

amazed and interested them most was to hear that we had actually been the guests of the Aussan Anfari. They plied us with many questions about his fabulous country, but we could not tarry to reply to one-half of them.

Our patient camels were unloaded, and we sent our baggage on by local transport to Kululli, the first of the Italian posts. Rosina and I took leave of our comrade Pastori, shaking him by the hand with many a wish that we might all foregather at some future time. We said farewell to those of our faithful men who had come with us — Abdul Kader, Wolde Jesus, Dimsa and Settie, and the poor potash-pickers set up a chorus of farewells too. Abdul Kader ran after us to say good-bye once more. He tried to take and kiss my hand again. I placed it on the good fellow's shoulder. 'It was written that we should come out alive,' he said, 'Allah alone protected us.' I was as certain of that as he was, and it was pleasant to remember that we had lost none of our sick men. Before many more days were past poor Wolde Johannes and the others would be breathing the life-giving air of their native uplands again as they travelled towards the capital.

Rosina and I passed between the two columns — and Danakil lay behind us. Walking in the night, with a company of strange new people, we arrived at a place called Iron Point. Here there is the beginning of a small mining tram-line, which reaches Mersa Fatima on the Red Sea coast, a little port at which the potash salts are shipped in native dhows for Massowa. At Iron Point, we slept appropriately amongst heaps of scrap-iron, rusty rails, and broken wheels. All these things were delightful to me; every bit of scrap-iron seemed an old friend. For three and a half months, I had seen no iron but spear-heads and daggers; no square piece of timber, nor wheel, had my eyes fallen on in that time. This was the night of June 26, 1928.

While we slept, the news of our arrival travelled to Kululli, and in the early morning Signor Pollera, an official of the potash company, came to welcome us. We set off with him, and

at eleven o'clock we passed the frontier into Eritrea. A few miles further on, we came to Kululli.

Signor Pollera welcomed us heartily into his house, where we found the appurtenances of a civilization we had by now grown somewhat disused to. We spent a day with our host, and then proceeded by the tram-line to Mersa Fatima, passing for fifty miles amongst arid hills, whereon there was not a sign of vegetation.

We remained two days at Mersa Fatima, and then, a native dhow having come into the anchorage for water, we hired it to take us to Massowa, where we arrived on July 4th.

The baby crocodile was still with us. After keeping it for over a year with me, I donated it to the Rome Zoo, where he still is in perfect health, and enormously grown.

Two days after our arrival at Massowa, Rosina proceeded on his way to Asmara and the Plateau, where his long-neglected farm lay. I was not left long in loneliness, for on the evening of the same day, a passenger steamer bound for Naples came into the harbour of Massowa, and I took passage in her.

As the ship steamed out into the Red Sea, the parting words of Abdul Kader came into my mind: 'It was written . . . Allah alone protected us.'

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A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH
THIS BOOK IS SET

The text of this book was set on the linotype in Baskerville. The punches for this face were cut under the supervision of George W. Jones, an eminent English printer. Linotype Baskerville is a facsimile cutting from type cast from the original matrices of a face designed by John Baskerville. The original face was the forerunner of the "modern" group of type faces. ¶ John Baskerville (1706-75), of Birmingham, England, a writing-master, with a special renown for cutting inscriptions in stone, began experimenting about 1750 with punch-cutting and making typographical material. It was not until 1757 that he published his first work, a Virgil in royal quarto, with great-primer letters. This was followed by his famous editions of Milton, the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and several Latin classic authors. His types, at first criticized as unnecessarily slender, delicate, and feminine, in time were recognized as both distinct and elegant, and both his types and his printing were greatly admired. Printers, however, preferred the stronger types of Caslon, and Baskerville before his death repented of having attempted the business of printing. For four years after his death his widow continued to conduct his business. She then sold all his punches and matrices to the Société Littéraire-typographique, which used some of the types for the sumptuous Kehl edition of Voltaire's works in
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